

Irene Dwee Andrew

mine

Best wishes for a
merry Xmas

— Bob.

12/25/19

THE GRAFTONS

BY THE SAME AUTHOR

THE HOUSE OF MERRILEES

EXTON MANOR

THE ELDEST SON

THE SQUIRE'S DAUGHTER

THE HONOUR OF THE CLINTONS

THE GREATEST OF THESE

THE OLD ORDER CHANGETH

WATERMEADS

UPSIDONIA

ABINGTON ABBEY

THE GRAFTONS

RICHARD BALDOCK

THE GRAFTONS

A NOVEL

BY

ARCHIBALD MARSHALL



NEW YORK

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1918

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TO
WILLIAM HENRY BATES

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INTRODUCTION

THIS novel, though it is complete in itself, deals with the same characters as "Abington Abbey." Its publication gives me the opportunity of replying to some criticisms of that novel, which would apply equally to this one.

The criticisms to which I refer have to do, not with faults of authorship, to which it would not be becoming to reply, but with matters for which an apology, or at least an explanation, may be offered.

The first has been that in such times as these a novel dealing with minor currents of life as they existed before the war is something of an anachronism. Perhaps it is. In the fourth year of the war, life as it is depicted in these two novels seems already far away. But what is a novelist of manners to do, granted the assumption—admittedly debateable—that he is to go on writing novels at all? He must either write *about* the war, in one or other of its far-reaching effects upon life, or else he must leave it alone altogether. At least, those are the only alternatives that I have felt to be open to me; and, after having written one novel with the war as its deliberate climax, I have chosen the latter. When the war is over, it will be possible to take its adjustments into account as affecting everyday life, but while it is going on I do not think it is possible. It looms too big. Minor affairs would have their values in contrast with it, and truth would suffer.

If further justification were necessary, I think I could find it in the relief it brings from the heavy

weight of the war to turn one's mind to those happy days in which life presented problems of less appalling significance than now, and to gain the comforting assurance that those days will come again. This relief I know to be felt by readers as well as by writers of fiction.

The second criticism upon which I should like to have my say is that the life I have depicted in those of my novels whose scenes are laid in the English country has been for some time a thing of the past, and after the war may be expected to disappear altogether. My American critics, kind as most of them are, often seem to accuse me of presenting an idyllic picture of a state of things which is based upon rotten foundations, and either of leaving out of account or of deliberately shutting my eyes to the rottenness.

I should not accept either charge. If it were worth anybody's while to read through those novels of mine in which the economic conditions of English landholding are touched upon, I think he would find in the first place that I have nowhere defended whatever abuses may still attach to the system, but have frequently satirised them; and in the second place that economic questions play but a small part in my fictions.

I think that if I had left such questions alone altogether there would be no criticism to meet. I could point to a dozen novelists who write about the same sort of people, living in the same surroundings, as I do, against whom it would not be brought, because they take the conditions for granted, and their readers take them for granted. If I touch upon such questions here and there it is because they interest me as factors in the lives of my characters; but they are not the factors which I have chosen as the main thesis of my novels, except in one instance. In "The Old Order Changeth"

I did seek to reflect the renewal that is always going on in English landowning, and always has gone on since the beginning,—where the new men come in to dispossess the old; and the social disturbance that takes place at each such upheaval, before the new become absorbed in their turn into the old.

That is how I see it. Whatever changes may have come and may be coming in the economic conditions of landholding, and of agricultural labour, the life of the country house, large or small, goes on much the same as ever, and will go on. Where it can no longer be supported by the land, it is supported by money made elsewhere. English people like the flavour of country life, and it is very seldom that a man who has made his fortune in business does not eventually buy or rent a country house. Many of the big estates in the United Kingdom have been acquired of late years by rich Americans, who buy them, I suppose, not as an investment in property, but because they also are attracted by the flavour of English country life. Country houses, from the great house such as is represented here by Abington Abbey down to the little house such as Stone Cottage, are scattered all over England, and I should say that in nine cases out of ten, taking large and small together, the people who inhabit them have no concern with the land, in the way of drawing any part of their income from it, or of dealing with it as a productive agency. They have not come “back to the land” in any essential sense; they have only come back to the country. I believe that no economic changes that may affect those who live by the land, whether as employers or labourers, will much affect the social life of English country houses.

As far as my novels are concerned, it is simply a question of placing the sort of people whom I know

best in the surroundings of which I like to write. Where my characters are in direct contact with the business of the land, or are affected by it, I do not shirk reference to it, as far as it seems to bear upon the main purpose of my story. But I have not set out to present an all-round picture of the conditions of country life in any of the fictional districts I have chosen as the scene of my novels. The great majority of the inhabitants of any countryside are the people who work on the land and live by it, and these I have left out almost entirely; not because I do not recognise their actual importance, but because in the social scene of my stories they would not appear, or only in a very minor degree. It may be an unsatisfactory state of things which divides people off in that way, into social strata, but it undoubtedly exists, and it is not the business of a novelist to justify the conditions he finds, but to reflect them; unless, of course, he sets out to make a discussion of those conditions the basis of his story.

As for my family of Graftons, who are real and dear to me, I have pictured them in the sunny days of peace. But in my vision, at least, the shadow of the war lies over them, as it does in retrospect over all immediately pre-war fictional characters. Dick Mansergh and Maurice Bradby would have been fighting since the beginning; Young George and his friend Jimmy would have been caught up in it by this time. In the slaughter of bright youth that is going on, it would hardly be expected that not one out of the four would be killed or wounded. George Grafton would be "doing something," with the men of his generation, and would hardly be able to regard life now as going so easily for him as to make of it a spiritual danger. The girls must have known sorrow and a much changed outlook, unless they have been more fortunate than most.

Yes, these are stories of the past, as much as if they had been written about people living forty or fifty years ago instead of four or five. But the shadow will pass away, and life will emerge again into the sunshine. I have looked forward, in writing them, as much as I have looked back.

ARCHIBALD MARSHALL.

March, 1918.

CHAPTER I

SURLEY RECTORY

THE old man lay dying at last. He had lingered on for months, now getting a little better and giving hope that the end might be deferred for a time, now sinking, so that it seemed as if it had come; but with all the alterations in his state moving onwards slowly and surely towards his rest. Now there was no longer any hope, even for a few days more. His two daughters and his son sat by his bedside, waiting. There was nothing to do but to wait, and to think.

It was towards the close of a sunny April day. The windows of the large eastward-facing room were wide open to admit the fragrant air. The birds were making a great to do in the Rectory garden, where the flowers of early spring flaunted their bright colours, and the lawns answered them with living verdure. Nearly every morning for five and forty years the old man who was dying had arisen from the bed on which he lay to look out on this scene. It might almost be said to have been what he had lived for. At the age of thirty-four, still a young man, with a wife still younger, and his two little girls, he had come to this assured haven, with no thought of leaving it until he had lived his life out to the full, where there was everything to make life what he wished it to be.

There was the pleasant roomy house, so admirably adapted to the delights of a quiet home life, the beautiful garden, the glebe and the outbuildings and the two or three cottages which added what was almost a little farm to what was almost a country mansion. And there was the substantial income, which would provide for the pleasures and hospitalities as well as the responsibilities of country life.

There was a little queer eighteenth century church, hardly more than a meeting-house, but big enough to hold such proportion of the three hundred or so inhabitants of the parish of Surley as would make a practice of attending it. It was to serve them that the Reverend William Cooper had been appointed to the living by the Bishop of the Diocese, and the house and the garden and the glebe and the substantial income were to be the reward of his service. None of the parishioners were very poor; the income would not be greatly depleted by the calls of charity. Nor would the time of their ministrant be too much occupied by them, supposing him to have other uses to which to put it.

He had done his work and taken his reward. There had never been any question in his mind that the one was not fitted to the other, nor any sense of diffidence before others who were spending themselves in the vineyard with material reward barely existent. It had been rather the other way about. The Rector of Surley was almost a dignitary, by reason of the reward, and carried himself so before his lesser brethren, but not with arrogance, for he was an amiable likeable man, and only

living up to his position. These things were so; it was not even necessary to excuse them, at least in those days.

An amiable likeable man! He had gone about his parish for five and forty years, until there were only two or three in it who were older than he. Most of them now living he had christened into the Church, many he had buried, some he had married, a few he had helped, as one helps friends, not as one gives doles to the poor. He had touched the lives of all of them, and they had been satisfied with him. It was not for them to complain of the established order. These things came from above. If the Rector of Surley lived in a big house, with a thousand a year, the Squire lived in a bigger one, with ten thousand a year. The one was no more explicable than the other, and no more or less to be criticised. What might come from either to ameliorate the lot of the less fortunate would depend upon what sort of Squire or Rector there might be.

Lying in his bed, as he had lain for months past, or when his strength had rallied sitting wrapped up in a big chair by the window, the old man must sometimes have occupied himself in casting up his accounts preparatory to the great Audit to which he would soon have to submit them.

His life had been kindly and useful. He had never turned a deaf ear to the call of sympathy, nor shirked any of his easy duties, as easy duties are sometimes apt to be shirked when no punishment is to be expected

from the shirking except from the disapproval of conscience. Probably he had given more thought to the episodes of his long life as they affected himself and his family than to the affairs of his ministry.

His wife had managed him until she had died, and then his daughters had managed him. In neither case had the managing been done in such a way as to irritate, or to lessen his dignity before the world. Perhaps he had hardly known that he had been managed, for he had had his own way, and had not been aware that it was often the way into which he had been guided. If both wife and daughters had sometimes raised bristles on the backs of neighbours, it had been his part to smooth them down, and he had gained liking by the contrast between himself and them. When his wife had died he would greatly have missed her sure capable hand in the affairs of life if his daughters had not then been of an age to fill her place. He was a man to be dependent upon women, and to draw the best that was in them towards himself.

The guidance exercised by women, however, seldom earns love, even when it escapes domination, and the guidance exercised by the old Rector's daughters did not always escape it, though they made his welfare the chief object in their lives. It was his son whom he loved, and thought most about, during the long hours in which he lay drifting towards the end.

He had come to him late in life. He was now not yet twenty-four. If he had been only a year older

the great anxiety which had shadowed the old man's last months would have been lightened.

The living of Surley was in the gift of the Bishop, but it had been held by a Cooper for three generations, covering a period of nearly eighty years. If only it could be handed on to Denis!

He had been ordained in the previous Advent, with a title to his father's curacy. He had done the work of the parish, with the help, or oversight, of his sisters, and taken such of the services as is permitted to a Deacon. The people liked him, and if these matters were arranged by the popular voice he would certainly have been the next Rector of Surley. But he would not be eligible for Priest's Orders for another seven months. It was almost too much to hope that the Bishop would present a Deacon of only a few months' standing to one of the richest livings in his gift.

But the old man could not give up hope. These things had been done before; he had a dozen cases at his fingers' ends. But unfortunately they were all cases dating back many years, to a time when the fitting of rewards to work done, or to be done, in the Church, had not seemed of such importance as now. Fifty years ago nobody would have made any fuss about such an appointment; now-a-days there would certainly be a fuss. But he would not admit that there ought to be; he only tacitly accepted the fact that it was impossible for him to take any steps to bring about what he so ardently desired.

The Bishop had been to see him during his illness. Perhaps he might have put in a word then; he had thought beforehand that he might. But he had not done so. To that extent he accepted the changed conditions. But none the less he deplored them. He felt it to be hard, for one thing, that he would have to die without knowing what should happen after him. His own uncle, whom he had succeeded in the living, had been made contented by a promise on his deathbed. He himself had known that he would be presented to the living a month or more before it had become vacant.

Ah! things were ordered better in those days. There was more human kindliness, and not so many Radicals, to interfere with what had been established for so long and had worked so well.

The two women and the young man sat by the bedside, speaking sometimes in low voices to one another, otherwise busy with their thoughts. Now and then one of them would rise and put a hand to pillow or sheet, but more to give herself the comfort of performing some little service for him who would soon be beyond her care than because he still needed it. For he lay quite still, with eyes closed, breathing faintly as if in sleep. They would not have known that the end was very near if the doctor had not told them that the quiet breathing might cease at any time, and left them to wait for the end.

There was not much emotion in the minds of either of them. The passing had been too long and too grad-

ual. Their brains were weary, if their active bodies were not. They had nursed him turn and turn about, with help from one or another of the faithful women about the house, but the nursing had made no great demands upon them. Neither would have admitted to the other that there was a slight sense of relief in the end having come at last. Gladly they would have kept him with them and spent themselves in his service, even if he should never speak to them or open his eyes upon them again. But they had grown used to the idea of losing him all the same. Life was strong in them, and there would be many things to do when he had gone.

The end came as the dusk began to gather in the corners of the room, with a fluttering breath that was like a faint sigh, and a silence hardly more complete than the silence that had been before. The old Rector of Surley was dead, and the way was open for a new Rector to be appointed.

The two sensible self-controlled women, who had for so long given their service with a cheerful capability that had seemed almost hard in its efficiency, faced a reaction that neither of them had been prepared for. They sobbed together, and confessed, each of them, that they had not so ardently wished that the dear old man should survive for a few hours or a few days longer than they now wished he had. They would never have him again alive. The thought was hardly to be borne. Their lives would be desolate.

This mood lasted all the evening, and was genuine

enough in its regret for a time now past and not valued enough while it had lasted. Denis was accused, though not to his face, of want of heart, because he said very little, and had shed no tears whatever. By the end of the evening the fact that they had, and could still do so, had come to be a consolation. By the next morning it had become difficult to shed tears at will, though they still came on occasions, but at rarer intervals. When all the business in connection with the funeral and the notifying of friends and relations had to be met they were ready to meet it, and found satisfaction in the occupations with which every hour of the days that followed were filled.

The letters and the calls of sympathy were most gratifying, as showing the high esteem in which the late Rector, and his family, were held. One of the first to call was Mrs. Carruthers, from Surley Park. There had been a coolness, but death overrode everything.

The sisters were writing letters at the dining-room table.

"We had better go in together," said Rhoda. "It will be less awkward."

"If she doesn't say anything I don't see why we should," said Ethel. "Let bygones be bygones, I say, at a time like this."

"I wonder if the Bishop has said anything to her," said Rhoda, as they went across the hall together. The Bishop of the Diocese was Mrs. Carruthers's uncle.

Mrs. Carruthers was very young and very pretty; too young, the Misses Cooper were accustomed to say,

and perhaps too pretty, though there might be two opinions about that, to be mistress of a property like Surley, which had been left to her unconditionally by her husband. The old Rector had been fond of her before the dispute had parted the Park and the Rectory, and even afterwards, for its details had been kept from him, and he had not realised that the break had been so complete as it actually had been.

Nothing was said about the cause of dispute, which had been concerned with the 'goings on' of a dairy-maid at Surley Park. There had been an episode with a young man, and the Misses Cooper, very stern upon keeping the morals of the parish up to concert pitch, had fastened themselves upon it firmly. But it was not the dairy-maid who had been concerned in the episode, and they and Mrs. Carruthers had differed as to the relative importance of their unfortunate mistake and of the fact that there had undoubtedly been something to complain of somewhere.

There were tears in Ella Carruthers's eyes as she came forward to meet the two sisters. "Oh, I am so sorry," she said. "The dear old man! Of course one knew the end must be coming, but it doesn't make it less hard to bear."

Rhoda and Ethel had tears too, to meet this. They had begun almost to enjoy the bustle, but were glad to be able to show that the sadder softer feelings still had sway with them. They were also relieved at the final disappearance of the coolness between themselves and their neighbour. There had been a formal mending

of the breach some months before, but they had not been in her house since, nor she in theirs. Soon they were talking to her about their father as if they had always been friends, and she was giving them genuine consolation by the affection she showed herself to have entertained towards him. Their feelings grew warmer, especially when she said, after they had talked about the old Rector for some time: "I do hope Denis will succeed him. I am sure that is what he would most have liked."

This, from the Bishop's niece, might or might not be significant. The Bishop was known to be very fond of her, and had stayed with her once at Surley Park, during the year in which he had occupied his See. It was with a sense of excitement that they set themselves to find out exactly how significant it might be.

"It was the one thing that he really desired," said Rhoda. "I think he had almost made up his mind to speak a word to the Bishop about it, when he came over to see him. But I suppose he felt he couldn't. I know he didn't."

"I fancy," said Ethel, "that he thought he could safely leave it in the Bishop's hands. After all, it would be far the best thing for the parish. That is undoubted."

"And the Bishop might be expected to see that," said Rhoda, backing her up. "He is very wise and farsighted. And he couldn't help liking and admiring our dear father."

The statement was almost a question. Ella Carruthers, faintly amused, treated it as such.

"Oh, no," she said. "He talked to me about him. He felt a great sympathy with him. I think he realised what his wishes were likely to be about Denis, though of course he didn't say anything about it to me."

The sisters did not ask themselves how, in that case, she could have divined the thoughts of her august relative. Both of them brightened visibly. "I don't like to hope too much," said Rhoda who, as the elder, always spoke first. "But it *would* be such a good thing for the parish."

"Everybody loves Denis," said Ethel. "There is nobody, I don't care who he is, who could influence them more. And we should be here to help him, as we always helped our dear father. They know our ways. Of course, one mustn't put it on personal grounds, but it *would* seem a pity for all our work here to be lost."

"We should work wherever we went," said Rhoda. "It is not ourselves we are thinking of. Neither of us would care to settle down to a selfish life without trying to influence our fellow-creatures for good. But I do feel that if we were not permitted to stay on and work here, a great deal that we have done during the last twenty years and more might be lost. People so soon relapse."

Ella Carruthers could hardly keep the smile from her lips. The idea of the parish relapsing into heathendom on the departure of the Misses Cooper amused

her, though, in her softer mood towards them, she only found it rather pathetic that they should disclaim personal interest in the decision that was soon to be made. She knew little about the conditions of Church patronage, and still less as to what her uncle's ideas on the subject were. But she thought she might 'put in a word' when he came to the funeral, as he had, most gratifyingly, announced his intention of doing; she had reason to believe, generally, that her word had weight with him. She left them with heightened hopes, which, if hardly justified by any influence in her power to exercise, at least put the seal upon the reconciliation between her and them.

"She really is kind at heart," said Rhoda, as they went back into the dining-room, after saying good-bye to her. "I shan't be sorry to be friends with her again."

"Nobody can say we have kow-towed," said Ethel. "It was the principle we stood up for, and although we frankly admitted the mistake we made we have never given way an inch upon that."

CHAPTER II

A QUESTION OF PATRONAGE

ELLA CARRUTHERS lunched at Abington Abbey on that day. The whole family were there except Young George, who was at school,—George Grafton, Caroline, Beatrix, Barbara, and Miss Waterhouse. The old Rector of Surley had been ill almost ever since the Graftons had come to live at the Abbey, and they had hardly known him. So the talk, as far as it concerned his death, was almost entirely devoted to the question of his successor.

The family took a keen interest in it. George Grafton was patron of the living Abington, and the Vicar of Abington, the Reverend A. Salisbury Mercer, was known to cherish hopes that the richer living of Surley would be offered to him. In that case Grafton would have to present another Vicar to Abington, and his family did not propose to deprive him of their advice upon the subject. Also, none of them liked the Reverend A. Salisbury Mercer.

“We’re divided, you see, Ella,” said Caroline. “We should like to get rid of Lord Salisbury, but we don’t think he deserves to have Surley.”

“And we rather love Denis,” said Beatrix. “He is frightfully solemn, and he hasn’t shown any indication of loving any of us, the few times we have met him,

which annoys us a little: but we're on his side, on the whole. We would keep Lord Salisbury for the sake of letting you have Denis."

"Thank you very much," said Ella. "We should all have to bear our crosses, whatever happened. Mine would be Rhoda and Ethel, if Denis gets it. But, as I told you once before, I should immediately set about finding him a wife, and then they would have to go. I think they would try to stop him marrying, whoever it was, and I should enjoy myself over it. I suppose none of you would care to take the situation. I could recommend you."

"I might," said Barbara, "if you'll wait till I have my hair up. I don't feel that I could love Denis passionately, but I could be a good wife to him if he didn't beat me."

"Barbara darling," expostulated Miss Waterhouse. "I don't like to hear you talk in that way. It is not delicate."

"I didn't mean it, Dragon dear," said Barbara. "I'm the most delicate-minded female, really."

"How would it be," said Grafton, "if we presented Denis to Abington, supposing Mercer got Surley?"

The suggestion was received with applause. "Really, Daddy, you're quite brilliant," said Beatrix. "Lord Salisbury would hate that more than anything, except Denis getting Surley."

"Beatrix dear," said Miss Waterhouse. "I don't think you should talk as if the object of presenting one clergyman to a living were to annoy another one."

"Quite right, Dragon," said Grafton. "The less we annoy the clergy the better, though they often annoy us."

"You would have Rhoda and Ethel here," Ella Caruthers warned them.

"Then I don't think you possibly can, Dad," said Caroline. "If you offer it to Denis you must stipulate that he pensions them off. I think that what we really want is a very nice old clergyman with white hair."

"A trifle infirm," added Beatrix.

"And with a nice old wife who goes about in a basket chaise," said Barbara. "Or else a very beautiful curate with a moustache, that I could fall in love with. Dragon darling, *don't* say I oughtn't to have said that. I must fall in love sometime, you know, and it would be so good for me to begin with a clergyman."

Fine weather had set in so early that year that tennis and croquet courts had already been marked out, and they played lawn tennis after luncheon. The court was visible from the road, little frequented, that ran through the park, and by and by the Vicar himself came along it, with his wife, and called out to announce that he was coming in.

"That's because he sees you here, Ella," said Beatrix. "He has rather left off inviting himself in that way. He will want to know if the Bishop has dropped any hints. Couldn't you possibly make up a few?"

There was a slight gleam in Ella Carruthers's eye as she took the suggestion, though there was no time to reply to it, for the Vicar was already approaching, pomposity clothing him like a garment, his smiling, good-natured little wife by his side. The game, which was nearly finished, was dropped by consent, and the Vicar, after requesting that it should be continued, but not pressing the point, was content to be surrounded by them on the seats that were disposed at the edge of the lawn.

"We were *so* sorry to hear of dear old Mr. Cooper's death," said Mrs. Mercer to Ella. "I'm sure it seems no time since he was as well and strong as anybody. I could hardly believe it when I heard it."

"It has been expected for a long time," said her husband. "He has passed away in the ripeness of his years, and there is no need to repine. We went over this morning to offer our sympathy to those who are left behind. They are bearing up very well, I am happy to say. But you had just been to see them yourself, Mrs. Carruthers. They were much gratified by your kind visit, and I hear that his Lordship is to come over and take part in the funeral."

"Yes, I believe so," said Ella. "I hope to get him to stay the night with me. It is some time since he came to see me, and we shall have a good deal to talk over."

"Ah!" said the Vicar, with semi-archness. "I know how much he values your advice. He has told me so himself."

"Really, Albert?" queried Mrs. Mercer, much interested. "You never told me that."

The Vicar looked slightly annoyed. "It was when I was over at the Palace," he said somewhat inadequately; and turned to Ella again. "It is rather pathetic," he said, "the way those poor girls cling to the idea that their young brother may be appointed to succeed their father. They even gain some encouragement from something that you let fall, as to his Lordship's intentions, no doubt with the idea of comforting them. But it would never do, you know. No Bishop in these days could afford to make such an appointment. It would create a scandal."

"Didn't you say, Albert, that it would amount almost to the sin of simony?" enquired Mrs. Mercer.

"Oh! good heavens, Ella!" exclaimed Grafton. "Do preserve your uncle from the sin of simony. That would be too awful."

The Vicar, sensitive to ridicule like most people of self-conceit, after a glance at the faces round him, turned upon his wife. "I should never have said so absurd a thing in such a connection," he said. "You are thinking of something quite different."

Ella Carruthers broke in. "My uncle has only been Bishop here for a little over a year," she said. "He has told me more than once that there has been a great deal to learn. And I know I have helped him in one or two things."

A gleam of satisfaction shone in the Vicar's eye. She seemed to be appealing to him for advice, which

she could pass on, and he was quite ready to give it. "Your uncle," he said, "has spent all his life of service—hard and devoted service, I know—in large towns. Though no man could rival him in knowledge of urban clerical problems, it would be nothing to be surprised at if he were not yet fully alive to all the currents of opinion among the country clergy."

"You have lived mostly in the country, Ella," said Grafton. "If you could give your uncle a few hints as to what the clergy think about these things he might perhaps be glad of it."

"Oh, I'm sure he would," broke in Mrs. Mercer enthusiastically. "Dear Mrs. Carruthers, please try. It would be such a splendid thing. And I'm sure there's nobody who could prime you up better than my husband. He has made a life-long study of these questions, just as the Bishop has about town questions."

The Vicar almost simpered. "I wouldn't compare any knowledge of mine with the Bishop's, my dear," he said. "At the same time, in my humble sphere, I have observed, and thought, and consulted with men perhaps wiser than myself, and I think I do know the conditions of a country diocese such as this, possibly, if I may say so without being misunderstood, as well as any Bishop."

"I know my uncle is always anxious to discover the opinions of people who really know things," said Ella. "And he is certainly not above taking advice."

"I should hardly presume to offer advice," said the Vicar. "For one thing, my position as incumbent

of one of the less important livings in the Diocese would hardly justify me in offering advice to my Diocesan. Personally, I am more than contented with my lot, and should never lift so much as a finger to change it. But if circumstances did conspire to move me to a higher sphere of influence, where it would not be unbecoming to lift my voice in advice, I should consider it my duty to do so, if asked, knowing that possibly I could thus serve my generation."

"I suppose the living of Surley would hardly give you that opportunity, would it?" asked Ella. "I think there are fewer inhabitants, and it is a poor little church."

"Oh, yes, dear Mrs. Carruthers, it *certainly* would," said Mrs. Mercer. "The Rector of Surley has always been a person of importance. Even old Mr. Cooper was, though compared with my husband—"

"Oh, *please*, my dear!" interposed her husband. "Let me speak for myself. Your question wants considering, Mrs. Carruthers. It is true, as my wife says, that the Rector of Surley has always been considered a person of some weight in the Diocese. The last two incumbents were Rural Deans, and Mr. Cooper would have been so if he had not considered himself too old when the office fell vacant. Yes, I think I may say that the Rectorate of Surley *would* provide scope for a man anxious to serve in the way we have been discussing, though it was not actually the sort of position I had in my mind. But I should think it probable that his Lordship has already made his deci-

sion. If not, and you have an opportunity of whispering a word in his ear, dear lady, warn him against such a grave mistake as the appointment of young Cooper would be. I speak—”

“But *don't*, for goodness sake, tell Rhoda and Ethel that my husband advised you to,” interrupted Mrs. Mercer. “We should never hear the last of it.”

The Vicar showed signs of acute annoyance. “Really, Gertrude!” he said. “One would think I was doing something underhand in speaking as I do.”

“Well, dear, of course we *have* both sympathised with them when they told us of their hopes. I know it was only to—”

But he would not let her go on. “For young Cooper as a man I have the utmost respect,” he said, “and if he were twenty or even perhaps ten years older and had proved himself in his sacred calling, as he will do—as I’m sure he will do—I should say institute him as Rector of Surley, and the blessing of God go with him. But it is not a personal question. Religion is too sacred a thing to be treated in that way, and I have a duty to perform that can’t be tampered with. For the Bishop’s own sake he should be warned against making a mistake of that sort, Rhoda and Ethel or no Rhoda and Ethel.”

“Well, Ella,” said Grafton, rising, “you know what to do and say, if you’re asked. I’m sorry for young Denis, because I should like to see him settled in a good fat living. But you see it wouldn’t do, and your uncle ought to be warned against it.”

The Vicar also rose. "At the same time," he said, "I shouldn't like it to be thought that the advice had come from me. It might almost look as if I wanted the living for myself, and I should greatly dislike that idea going abroad."

"But you wouldn't refuse it if my uncle were persuaded that you were the best man to give it to?" hazarded Ella.

"I should consider it," said the Vicar, after a moment's weighty pause. "I can't say more at present than that I should consider it."

As his wife also seemed about to express herself upon the subject he took his leave, somewhat hurriedly, and carried her along with him. Grafton and Caroline accompanied them to the garden gate.

"Isn't he the limit?" enquired Beatrix when they were out of earshot. "*Can* he think we're all such fools as not to see through him?"

"I wanted to see how far he would go," said Ella. "Really, I think it would be almost worth while having him at Surley to be able to play with him. But from this moment I am heart and soul on the side of Denis, Rhoda and Ethel or no Rhoda and Ethel."

This was not the only clerical invasion of the Abbey on that afternoon. It contained a household which presented such attractions to friendly neighbours that a day seldom went by without a visit from one or more of them. Worthing, the agent of the Abington property, as well as of the adjoining one of Wilborough, and his pupil, Maurice Bradby, came to re-

inforce the tennis players. So did Richard Mansergh, the eldest son of Sir Alexander, of Wilborough, a sailor home on leave, and already if appearances went for anything, desperately enamoured of Beatrix. And about tea-time the party was joined by the Reverend Rogers Williams, Vicar of Feltham, and his wife, who came over on bicycles, accompanied by several Aire-dale terriers, whose breeding they supervised in the intervals of more serious occupations. They were known as the Breezy Bills in the Grafton family, and a closer intimacy had been established with them during the previous holidays by Young George, who had taken a youthful liking to their daughter, Maggie, aged fourteen.

Tea was in the Long Gallery upstairs, and the talk was mostly about the Rectory of Surley.

"Are you a candidate?" asked Grafton of Mr. Williams. "Because if so we shall have to be careful what we say. I may tell you at once that our sympathies are with young Denis Cooper."

"I a candidate!" exclaimed Mr. Williams with a hearty laugh—he laughed heartily at anything in which a humorous significance might be inferred, and at many things where it was not apparent,—“Oh, good gracious, no! Wouldn't leave Feltham for anything in the world. We've got everything exactly as we like it there, haven't we, dear?"

"Yes," said his wife. "The kennels couldn't be beaten and they've cost us a lot of money, which we should lose if we moved. And there's the carpentering

shop too. Oh, no, we look on at it all and laugh about it, don't we, dear?"

Mr. Williams laughed about it. "I don't know about young Denis," he said. "That would be rather a tall order, as things go now-a-days. There's one fellow, though, that I hope *won't* get it. But perhaps I'd better not say who he is in this company." He laughed again.

"Oh, we know who you mean," said Caroline. "We hope he won't get it either. But why shouldn't Denis?"

"I suppose because all the rest of us would kick up such a fuss," said Mr. Williams, laughing most heartily. "I shouldn't on my own account, but there are lots of older men who have worked hard all their lives who ought to be considered before a young one just beginning. There's nothing to do there either. A young fellow ought to have something to do."

"Oh, I beg your pardon," said Ella. "Rhoda and Ethel find a great deal to do, and Denis is never idle. I can't take your view of it at all, and I hope my uncle won't."

Mr. Williams laughed. "We were wondering how much Mrs. Carruthers might have to do with it as we rode over, weren't we, dear?" he asked of his wife, and laughed again.

"We hope she is going to have a great deal to do with it," said Beatrix. "We are heart and soul for Denis."

Richard Mansergh, who was sitting next to her,

frowned slightly. "Brill—our fellow—was saying that with that big house and good income there ought to be a sort of community there," he said.

"That's just what Father Brill would say," said Mrs. Williams. "Everybody likes Father Brill; but preserve us from having our nice Rectories and Vicarages filled with people of his sort. I don't mean his sort personally, but celibates stalking about in cassocks, and no women in the parsonages for poor people to come to. It wouldn't do at all."

"I'm sure it wouldn't," said Worthing. "You can't change and muddle up English country life like that. What were all the parsons' houses built for? You've got them in every village in the land, so that there should be an educated man able to live like a gentleman; and now people like Brill want to put it all back again. It won't do."

"You speak with considerable heat, James," said Grafton.

"Well, I think it's a lot of tommy-rot," said Worthing, "and I've often told Brill so. The people don't want it. The happiest state of things for them is where an old-fashioned Squire is doing his duty, and an old-fashioned parson is doing his duty."

"And an old-fashioned agent is doing his duty," hazarded Barbara.

Worthing eyed her askance, and then chuckled. "You're a cheeky young baggage," he said, "but you're not far wrong either. The agent has to drive the

team, and it wants some driving. It's the human side that's wanted; that's what it is—the human side."

He came abruptly to an end, with a frown of perplexity on his ample, not over-intellectual face. It was Caroline who interpreted his ideas for him further.

"You're quite right, dear Uncle Jimmy," she said. "That's what strikes one when one gets into country life a little. The system may not be perfect, but it works splendidly with the right people to look after it."

Her father smiled at her indulgently. "What do you know about the system?" he asked her.

"Oh, I've been reading," she said. "I read a lot when you are up in London, Dad, and don't want looking after."

"I don't see much wrong with the system," said Richard Mansergh. "It's worked jolly well for hundreds of years, and it's only the Radicals who want to upset it."

"The naughty wicked Radicals, of course!" said Beatrix. "I like them better than the Tories myself. I once met Mr. Birrell, and he's the sweetest old lamb in the world."

"One swallow doesn't make a summer," said Richard. "Wait till you've met a few more."

Mr. Williams laughed heartily. "They'd like to turn us all out," he said. "But we won't *be* turned out—not without a struggle. I don't think there's much wrong with the system either, and I'd rather

see young Denis Rector of Surley than one of Father Brill's communities there."

"Oh, so would I," said Ella, "and I hope my uncle will make him. He's old for his years already, and every day he'll get older."

"Do you think the Bishop will appoint him?" asked Mr. Williams.

"I don't know," she said. "If I knew I'd say so. But I do know that whatever he does it won't be because he's afraid of what people will say about him."

CHAPTER III

IN THE GARDEN

THEY went back to the tennis courts after tea, but there were not enough of them to make up two sets, the Breezy Bills having left on their bicycles, followed by a trail of Airedales. "Come and look at the rock-garden," said Caroline to Maurice Bradby.

The young man brightened visibly. He had sat silent during the conversation at the tea table, as he generally sat silent in company, being too diffident to put forward his views in a general conversation. But he had views of his own on many subjects, and those who took the trouble to elicit them often found them interesting.

Caroline was one of these. She was no older than he, but had seen so much more of the world and its inhabitants that her feeling towards him was almost maternal.

He was not like the young men whom she had met in such shoals in London ball-rooms and in country houses, not one of whom, however they might differ in character and tastes, but had done and known many of the things that she had. Bradby was the son of a clergyman, and had left his provincial Grammar-school for a stool in a provincial bank, to be released from it after four years of unhappy confinement for the coun-

try life after which his soul had always hankered. The country was a passion with him, and Caroline had penetrated some of his depths at an early stage, when the rest of the family were only in the state of finding him uncommonly heavy in hand, because his upbringing had not trained him to respond to the easy intimacy which they offered to all whom they thought worthy of it, and had offered to him on his introduction to them under Worthing's wing. Caroline, sweet and kind to all who seemed to need helping in the world, had taken more trouble about him than the rest, but they had all come to accept him by this time for what he was. It was no longer awkward to have him sitting silent while talk flowed high all about him; they knew him too well to be obliged to drag him into it out of politeness, or for one of them to detach herself to talk to him. And it was only in talk that he was backward. If there was anything to do he was a stand-by,—clever and capable and interested. All of them liked him very well, but only Caroline had come to be unaffected by his dissimilarity from type.

He was tall and loosely built, with large, strong hands, and, it must be confessed, with unusually large feet. His hair was not well brushed, and looked as if it could not be. His features were indeterminate, but he had large, dark eyes which somehow redeemed them. His clothes were unobtrusive, but whatever he wore he never looked well-dressed. Among the smart young men of the Graftons' large circle of friends, who came down to shoot at Abington or to spend week-ends there,

and even those who were not smart but belonged obviously to the same class, he seemed always out of place. This was somewhat of an annoyance to Beatrix, who was apt to complain that there was no reason why he should so persistently take a back seat, considering that they had done all they could to make a friend of him. But it did not annoy Caroline. She had seen once or twice young men among their visitors who did not live and move wholly on the surface of things find something in common with him. He was her protégé. She did not even want to see him 'smartened up,' as Beatrix, commenting upon his unaccented appearance, had sometimes suggested as a process that would improve him.

The rock-garden, fashioned the previous year out of a disused stone quarry across a paddock from the garden, was full of interest, in this its second flowering season, and attracted visits at all hours of the day. Maurice Bradby had worked hard with hands and brains at its construction, and knew more about what was growing in it than any of its owners. He had had few opportunities of acquiring garden knowledge in the provincial town in which most of his life had been spent, but he sucked in and assimilated such knowledge without effort, and added to it by close observation, and to a lesser extent by study of his subject. All subjects that had to do with nature found this eager response in him, and Worthing, a countryman by birth and upbringing, had said more than once that he had never had a pupil so easy to teach.

Bradby found his voice the moment they were clear of the tennis lawn. "What did you mean about the system being wrong just now?" he asked.

She looked up at him with a smile. "I don't think I said it was wrong, did I?" she said. "I said that it wanted the right people to make it work."

He seemed to be considering this, and she said, half jestingly, "I know you think everything is right in the country."

"It's right for me," he said simply. "I suppose it's right for you, too, isn't it?"

"Yes; but then look how you and I are placed."

He considered this too. "We're not placed in the same way," he said. "I'm part of the machine, and I'm learning to be a still more important part of the machine."

"Well, am I not part of the machine too? If we were just here to enjoy ourselves, as some people do buy country houses just to enjoy themselves, I suppose that would mean standing apart from the machine. But we aren't like that, are we?"

He did not reply at once, and as they had now reached the rock-garden, and Caroline's next words were about the flowers that were showing their vivid spring colours in the amphitheatre all about them, the conversation was broken off for the time.

But it was resumed again a little later, as they stood here and there, or moved slowly up and down the rocky stairs or about the stone paths.

"You know, I think we did take it rather as a new

toy when we first come down here," Caroline said. "We loved the country, and we wanted a country house of our very own. Of course we've all enjoyed it awfully in that way, but I don't think any of us thought we should live here so much as we have. We've hardly lived in London, all together, since. And we are always wanting to get back here when we do."

"Mr. Grafton doesn't take such an interest in the estate as Sir Alexander does in Wilborough?" he said.

She laughed. "Darling old Dad!" she said. "It is rather a bore to him. He works when he is in London, and likes to play down here, and leave the work to you and Uncle Jimmy. But he's a good Squire all the same, isn't he? He gives you everything you ask for."

"Oh, yes. There's never any trouble about money to run the show as it ought to be run. I only meant he didn't take much interest in details."

"I don't suppose people at the head of a big business generally do, do they? They leave the details to the people they can trust. Dad wouldn't take much interest in the details of his banking."

"Oh, well, I see what you mean. This isn't his real business as it is Sir Alexander's. Still, there's something I can't get quite right in my mind. It's all so—well, so happy, to me, that I don't like to think there's a flaw anywhere—in the system, I mean. Mr. Grafton pays for it, doesn't he? He makes his

money somewhere else. He bought the estate, but it can't return him much on his capital—certainly not enough to live on in the way you do."

"No, but why should it? We get all the fun of it extra. I suppose you may say Dad pays for that. It returns enough to run itself, though. I suppose you and Uncle Jimmy see to that."

"Oh, yes. It keeps us going, too. And everything is run as it ought to be. All the farms are let, and everybody is contented,—or ought to be. Everybody is getting a living, anyhow, out of the land."

"I love to think of people getting a living out of the land."

His eyes shone as he turned his face quickly to her. "Do you feel like that about it, too?" he asked. "So do I. It fills me with pleasure. I like to think of everything that's growing on the land, and every little thing that's done to make it grow, and the men who do it all; and some of them get so wise, always living and working on it, that you would never learn all they know if you read about it till the end of your life."

"I talked to old Bull once while he was laying a fence," she said. "He was proud to let me see how cleverly he was doing it, and that it wasn't so easy as it looked. He has been hedging and ditching all his life, and he enjoys it as much as anything he could do."

"Yes, I know. That's the sort of work a man can

enjoy, with his hands. You're helping nature, and if you learn the ways of nature she helps you. There's never any monotony in nature. She's alive."

"When you see people like that, you're apt to be ashamed of yourself for all the things you want to make you contented. Old Bull has brought up a large family on less than half of what I have for a dress allowance. His dear old wife,—I know her too—gets the most out of every penny that he gives her, and he has all he wants at home. There's no anxiety about life when you've been trained to do without things and not to want them."

"No, you get your satisfaction out of the things you have, and they are much bigger than the things you do without."

"They have enough to eat and drink, and good clothes to wear. They have their family interests, and their friends. They see people they know, and have known all their lives, more easily than people like us do. They hardly ever move out of their village, but the little changes of life from day to day and from week to week, with their work, and their times of leisure, are enough for them."

He smiled at her. "It's an idyllic picture," he said. "There are people who will tell you that you won't keep them on the land except by bringing the pleasures of the town to them."

She did not hesitate; her ideas seemed to be clearly set. "That's mostly the young people," she said. "I'm only thinking now of the older ones, who really

belong to the land. Their interests are in it, and I think it brings them something as near contentment as it is possible to have."

"You feel a little like that about it yourself, don't you?" he asked half shyly.

She smiled. "I suppose we are generally thinking a little about ourselves when we are talking about other people," she said. "I know how different my life is from theirs—how much more I want to—to keep me quiet. But I know that the more simple I make it, and the more it depends upon what lies around me, the happier I am."

He looked at her almost with veneration. She was an unusually pretty girl, with an expression of sweetness and kindness which was more than her beauty. To him she seemed so far above all other girls whom he had ever seen as to be of a different flesh and spirit. Beatrix was even more beautiful than Caroline, and she was kind and sweet too, though with more contrariety in her. But to him she was common clay beside Caroline, whose lightest word he was inclined to receive as an oracle. Both of them seemed to him, in his self-respecting timidity, far above himself. He had had no contact with the life they represented before he had come to Abington, and thought himself quite unfitted to take part in it, with its ease and elaboration of wealth and unfamiliar custom marking it at every turn. To think of himself as anywhere on the same footing as these shining girls would have seemed to him hardly less presumptuous than to think

of himself as on a level with a Royal Princess. But just as the goddesses of old time filled the hearts of mortal men with bliss by showing them what they shared with them, but never lost their godhead by so doing, so Caroline moved his wonder and admiration by letting him into some of the secret places of her nature, which was as fair as its outward form, but still remained high above him.

"It's what I feel," he said gently, "though I lived a dull life before I came here, and you lived a gay one. I've given up nothing that I wanted. I enjoy my life much more; but still it's a good deal simpler than it was."

"It comes of doing the work you like in the surroundings you like," she said sagely. "With a woman it isn't so much the work as all the little ways of spending her time. She doesn't as a rule, unless she's creative, or has to earn her own living, work by herself, or for herself. She is in touch with others all the time. I never thought of myself as having a place here, except the one I have always had at home. But I have, you know. I've made friends with a great many people. We all have. We know most of the people in the village, and all the children. I suppose I just thought of Abington, when we first came down, as a lovely house in which we could enjoy ourselves, by ourselves, or with the friends we asked to come here, and the people we should get to know in the houses round. I never thought of it as a place with a few hundred people living right round you. But now I know them,

it's different. I have plenty of friends among them too, friends who tell me things about themselves, and like to hear what I have to tell them. I think I have made myself part of the machine, after all. But I like to think about it as a big family."

They were walking back to the tennis lawn by this time. "Yes, that's what Worthing meant by the human side," said Bradby. "I know he thinks a lot about that, and we have talked about it. It isn't giving them charity; they don't want that; or they ought not to want it. It's feeling that you're all the same flesh and blood. If there has been anything wrong with the system, that's what has kept it together all these years."

Richard Mansergh and Beatrix did not talk about the system when they presently betook themselves for a stroll in the evening sunlight, before he mounted his horse to ride home. He had, in truth, a little difficulty in persuading her to take it with him, for his admiration of her had by this time reached the point at which it demanded expression, and expression in its turn was apt to demand answers of a kind which she was not ready to give. But at this time she rather prided herself upon her total immunity from the softer passions, and gained some satisfaction in fencing with them when they were obtruded on her notice. It was only a question of whether or no she was in the mood to exercise her wits that made her accept or decline these contests, and she had only hung back a little because her late activities had rather tired her.

She was enough to turn the head of any man, with her sweet flower-like face, whose mischievous eyes only made it more bewitching. She was only nineteen, and her slender form had hardly yet filled out to womanhood, but showed delicious soft curves of neck and shoulder. She wore a short white skirt and a white silk blouse, all very workmanlike for her play, but most femininely becoming. A wide-brimmed hat, which she caught up from the seat beside her, slightly altered the note of her clothes. She seemed to the young man more desirable thus, walking by his side, than in the activities of the game, although he had admired her grace and skill too while she had been playing. Perhaps the hat was put on instinctively to soften the impressions of athleticism; but a wide hat brim also conceals eyes and mouth from one who is considerably taller, when it is to be desired that they shall be concealed.

Richard Mansergh was some years older than she—a Commander in His Majesty's Navy, and a good man at his job, a born lover of the sea, but just at present anxious to spend as much time away from it as rules and duties stretched to their utmost limit would allow. He was taller than most sailors, and rather good-looking or rather ugly according to whether regularity of feature or perfection of limb should appeal to the observer. In form he was something of an Adonis, and the shape of the head and the way it was set on his neck hardly prepared one for a face that was not that of an Adonis, though it showed

strength and a cleanness that had its attraction too.

He was very deeply in love, more deeply in love than he had ever been in his life, or had ever thought to be with a very young girl, since his salad days were long since over. He was of an ardent temperament, and previous loves had burnt themselves out without ever coming to the point of a strong desire for matrimony. But this time it was coming to that, if he could win himself any response from this intoxicating, tormenting, elusive creature, whose image had imprinted itself so deeply on his inward vision that he walked the earth or sailed the seas with it ever before him. He was masterful in his ways, and his wooing, when once he had made up his mind, was direct. But he would never propose to her, if he wooed her for ten years, unless he gained some sign of love from her. He wanted the whole of her, for his very own. It was like heady wine to him to think of her with him always, in spirit if not in body. All he would have, all he would do, would be hers, but she must make it so first, and she must give him back all that was in her, all the endless treasures of her mind and her spirit, which thrilled him afresh every time he brought a new one to light. He had never felt like that about any woman before, and he exulted in the strength of his passion, and the new things about love that it was teaching him. They were all good things, and made the cleanest of his past loves seem like mere sensuality. It would be the true, deathless marriage, if he could win her.

Beatrix was far from suspecting on what a pedestal of adoration he had set her. It hardly showed in the way he treated her, which was masterful and encroaching. She knew she was being stormed, and rather enjoyed it, but she did not know how the weather would change, if she surrendered. Then there would be a deep enduring calm, and strength in which she could rest herself. If she surrendered! She was nowhere near it at present.

"I want you to tell me about that fellow you were in love with."

She turned a little pale at the shock, and stood still on the grassy path down which they were wandering towards the yew-enclosed lily pond. She was used to his abrupt attacks, and had nerved herself to meet one, as he had walked silent by her side. But she had not expected anything like this.

Her momentary pallor was succeeded by a deep blush, as she looked up at him with protesting eyes. He met her gaze, and adored her afresh because she did not look down.

"Really, I'm not going to talk to you about that," she said indignantly.

He went on, and after a moment's hesitation she went with him, though her inclination was to turn back. But she never ran away from anything.

"Why not?" he asked. "It's nothing to be ashamed of. I want to know how much you cared for him."

The shock once over, Beatrix was not sorry to have her lips opened for her. It is not often that a girl

is given the opportunity of explaining that she did not care very much for a man to whom she has been engaged, and who has left her; at least, not to anybody to whom the statement will bring pleasure, and credence.

"Haven't you ever known what calf-love is?" she enquired, beginning by being very hard upon herself.

"Oh, yes, rather. All men do. It's nothing to be ashamed of. Love's a very beautiful thing, you know, and if you like beautiful things you're on the lookout for it from an early age. Sometimes it's the right sort of thing you get hold of, but as you don't know much when you're first attacked you generally don't."

Beatrix felt herself helped. "Well, I suppose girls have it, too," she said. "In books they are generally supposed to begin with a curate."

She felt suddenly rather like crying, she could not have told why; but it was because the love she had given to the man who had been sent away from her and had not come back again, had been a sacred thing, though now it was dead; and its uprooting had left a wound which had not yet become a scar. She was glad to sit down on one of the stone seats of the lily-pond garden, which by this time they had reached.

"*You* wouldn't do that sort of thing," he said. "I expect until that fellow made love to you, you'd laughed at it all."

This was quite true, and she felt herself lifted by his understanding. It was painful to have loved and to

love no longer; but since she did love no longer it was more comforting to her self-respect to believe that her love had been of a lighter quality than she had thought it at the time.

She dropped the ugly idea of calf-love. She could do better than that, on consideration. "I should have been a Marquise you know," she said, "and a very rich and important one. Girls are apt to be bowled over by that sort of thing, you know."

"*You* wouldn't be, though," he said again with great directness.

This was quite true too. She was flattered, but was not prepared to drop this line entirely. And she believed every word she was saying. "I don't mean that I was on the lookout for a title, in that crude sort of way," she said. "I don't think I'm like that."

How entirely unlike it he thought her he found it difficult to refrain from saying in a way that might have startled her, touched as he was by the pathetically doubtful note in her speech.

"Of course you're not," he said. "I told you so. But I suppose everybody all round you was egging you on, and flattering you about it. You'd like to think you were pleasing people."

How understanding he was, in spite of the rough shocks his speeches sometimes brought with them! It really had been like that, at first.

"My darling old Daddy wasn't pleased at all," she said. "He hated it."

"Yes, I know he did. It's a great feather in his

cap. Most fathers would have gone about purring. He was a good-looking fellow too, wasn't he? I never saw him myself, but my brother Geoffrey says he was."

This was a line she would rather have kept off of. "Yes, I suppose he was," she said judicially. "He was a lot older than me, and had seen a great deal of the world. Of course that flattered me. I don't think a younger man would have swept me off my feet as he did."

The Marquis de Lassigny had been thirty-six at the time of his quick wooing of Beatrix. Richard Mansergh was thirty-two, and had also seen a good deal of the world. This statement brought him pleasure.

"I see now," said Beatrix, speaking very calmly, "that I thought of him as possessing all sorts of qualities that weren't really his. Of course I thought I knew a great deal about men, as I had been out a whole season, and had seen so many of them. Now I see how little I really knew."

She was getting on very nicely, but his next words brought a check. "But you did love him," he said, uncompromisingly. "You wanted to give him everything that was in you."

How true that was she felt a pang in remembering. Whatever his love for her had been, hers had been for him the entire surrender of all she was or would be.

She was on her defence. "I told you I didn't know enough," she said. "But I had never loved anybody

before—in that way. Of course I gave all the best that was in me.”

He caught his breath. It wouldn't have been she if she hadn't done that. But what a treasure for a man to throw away! “He can't have been fit to black your boots,” he said, “or he'd have waited for you for twenty years.”

She felt the need of a lighter note. “I should have been old and ugly by that time,” she said.

“You'd have been neither. But if you'd lost all your looks you'd have been just the same.”

She was touched by the almost impersonal conviction in his speech, and comforted by his belief in her. But she was not yet ready. “It's very kind of you to say that,” she said. “He didn't think so. And I'm very glad he didn't now. It took me a little time to get over it, but I *have* got over it. I don't want anything that I haven't got now. I love my family, and they love me, and we're all going to be happy together for a long time. Now, I think we'll go in.”

He rose obediently and walked back to the house by her side. She had given him no opening such as he ardently longed for, no response that might bid him hope. But he could wait for that. It would come in time, if mortal man could do anything to induce it.

As for her, she was in a more emotional state than appeared on the surface. Such an experience as she had undergone—to love for the first time, and to have the love rejected—could scarcely help hardening a nature such as hers, yielding and trustful. But the

hardening would not set in until the wound became a scar; and he had opened it again, and delayed the process.

It served him better than he knew that he had done so.

CHAPTER IV

A PRESENTATION

THE old Rector of Surley was duly buried, and all his friends and neighbours for miles round attended his burying. The Bishop was there, sympathetic and urbane. He talked most kindly to the Misses Cooper, and in such a way as once more to bring to their eyes those tears which the abundant business of the past few days had almost dried up. And he was closeted with Denis for nearly half an hour in the comfortable study of which the young man had made himself the occupant. Thereafter he retired to his niece's house, and spent a pleasant restful afternoon and evening, not too much overcome with melancholy to enjoy the little change.

Had he said anything? The sisters had hardly been able to restrain themselves from listening outside the door, and fastened upon Denis the moment their illustrious guest had left the house.

Denis frowned slightly. No, he had said nothing.

What had they talked about then? They were not going to be put off in that way, by the brother they had nursed, and smacked, not so many years before. They supposed, rather sharply, that he and the Bishop had not spent all that time together in silence.

Denis did not give them much information, but left

them to infer that the Bishop's talk had just been that of a kind wise Father in God with a young man setting out upon his life's work. They construed this into a wish on his part to find out for himself whether this particular young man was a suitable object for his patronage, and hoped afresh. If he had *not* been going to offer Denis the living, he would certainly have said so, and advised him what to do when his curacy at Surley came to an end. For a new incumbent would not want a curate. Denis would either stay on as Rector or depart altogether.

Two or three days went past. Denis went to London on business connected with his father's estate, and having got there sent a telegram to say that he should not be returning until the following day.

His sisters did not quite like this. He had given no reason for staying away over the night, and, if they would have disclaimed the right to direct his movements, there was still a lingering idea in their minds that they ought to be consulted about them. He had taken up no clothes, and there was the hint of a suspicion that he had given them the slip; also that he had stayed up to amuse himself, which would not be becoming so soon after the sad event. Denis had always been extraordinarily well-behaved, and wise and steady beyond his years. They prided themselves a good deal on the way he had been brought up. He would not do anything actually wrong; that they were sure of. Still, it was a good thing that he would have them there to look after him. If he were ap-

pointed Rector of Surley, he would want all the advice, and direction, that they could give him, at his age. They had made it plain to the Bishop, without, of course, obtruding themselves or their desires, that he could rely upon them to give that advice and direction.

The next morning the long-expected letter came. There was no doubt about it. It was written in the episcopal hand and sealed with the episcopal seal. Really, it was extraordinarily tiresome of Denis not to be there to open it.

It did not, however, take them quite half a minute to decide to open it themselves. A longer period of hesitation would have made it appear that it was not the most natural thing to do, as of course it was. Denis would certainly have asked them to open it if he had known he would be absent when it came, and after all, the letter was as important to them as it was to him.

They drew a long breath of delight and relief as they devoured its contents together. As they told one another immediately afterwards, they had really not dared to hope, but now their fears were set at rest it was easy to see that nothing else could have happened. If only their dear father could have known!

They both thought of him, in the pleasure to which they now gave themselves up. It would have sent him out of the world happy, the dear old man. Really, if the Bishop had intended to present Denis all along,

he *might* have stretched the point and relieved their father's mind of its anxiety.

When they had settled down to the news, and to their cooling breakfast, a slight reaction set in. They felt all the fears and doubts with which they had lived for so long rolling back upon them, though now they should have been set at rest. Really, it *had* scarcely seemed possible that the living should be given to Denis, considering his youth, and his Deacon's orders. Their talk for a time was almost as if they were blaming the Bishop for his presentation, and covered most of the ground that might have been taken by the Vicar of Abington, or other clerical critics, of such an appointment. But this state of mind, induced by fears too little allowed, and helped by the kind things the Bishop had said in his letter, soon disappeared. There would be a great deal of criticism to meet, and they at least must not show themselves to be influenced by any of it. The Bishop had made the appointment of his own free will, and on grounds that seemed good to him. They had done nothing to urge him, nor had they pulled any strings. That was a great comfort to them now, and they gave themselves and one another considerable credit for it. Then they decided that they had better not say anything about the appointment until Denis returned home. After all, the letter *had* been written to him, and the news could wait. This was their only reference to the fact of their having opened the letter, and they felt that it covered everything.

But as Denis did not arrive by the train that would have brought him home in time for lunch, and could not now be expected until six o'clock, the news began to sit heavily upon them. They had been busy indoors all the morning, and had had only to stifle the natural desire to tell the servants. In the afternoon they went about the parish, and could not forbear from encouraging several with whom they had dealings by telling them that it was quite possible that they would not have to leave them after all. But as they had said this before, though not perhaps with the same satisfied look in their eyes, the secret was kept.

They came home to tea, and now they longed for Denis's return, for the news had burnt itself right through their lightly formed purpose, and only the hour or so that they would have to wait for him prevented their summoning all the servants, indoor and outdoor, and imparting to them their triumph.

There came a ring at the bell, and presently Mr. and Mrs. Mercer were announced. Rhoda and Ethel cast a sharp and identical meaning glance at one another before they rose to receive them. It said as plain as if spoken: "*You won't be able to keep it in.*"

Denis's absence was explained and commented upon.

"I wanted to see him particularly," said the Vicar. "An old friend of mine, who has somewhat broken down in health, needs an assistant priest to go to him and do just the work that Denis has been doing here for your dear father. It would be the very place for him, if—if he were free to take it." He mentioned the

name of his friend, of the pretty village in Devonshire of which he was Rector, and the stipend offered, while Rhoda and Ethel listened politely with meaning smiles on their faces, and wondered how they could ever have liked this man.

Mrs. Mercer saw the smiles, and though she did not understand their full import divined something of their source. "Of course, dear," she said, "we know it is *possible* that Denis may be preferred to this living. In that case this offer would be of no use to him. We only thought that if he *wasn't*—! And my husband hasn't told you that there's a charming little house, big enough for all three of you."

"There was never really any chance of Denis's appointment here," said the Vicar, not without annoyance. "It was quite right to humour the poor old gentleman, as he so set his heart upon it; but Rhoda and Ethel are far too sensible to have any such ideas themselves; and it would be wrong too."

Rhoda had once boasted that there was nothing of the cat in her, but she enquired very sweetly, "And why wrong, Mr. Mercer?"

"My dear girl," said the Vicar, "you know as well as I do. It would be a job, and Bishops dare not perpetrate jobs in these days. And if you are inclined still to cherish hopes of that sort, as it is perhaps not altogether unnatural that you should, as you had to persuade your dear father of it for so long, let me tell you at once that the appointment has already been made, I am not at liberty to say in

what quarter. But you will hear about it very soon."

It was Ethel who said, "Oh, really, Mr. Mercer! Did the Bishop tell you that himself?"

"You never told *me*, Albert, when you came back from the Palace yesterday," said Mrs. Mercer in an aggrieved voice.

"It was not the Bishop himself, of course," said the Vicar. "But I had it on the best authority. Please don't ask me any more. The conversation was confidential."

"It wasn't *you* it was offered to, dear, was it?" enquired his wife. "No, I'm sure you would have told me that. I suppose Mr. Burgoyne must have told you." Mr. Burgoyne was the Bishop's chaplain.

The Vicar, like most self-important but weak men, was incapable of keeping anything to himself under pressure, and when Rhoda said, as sweetly as before: "If you've told us as much as that I think you *might* tell us who the living has been offered to. Secrets are absolutely safe with us," he hummed and ha-ed, and then said: "Well, Burgoyne did not actually extract a promise from me to keep it to myself, but he gave me to understand,"—how grateful he was afterwards to have put it in that way—"that Leadbetter was to have it. It would be an appointment not altogether free from criticism. I believe that Leadbetter has never held a parochial charge, but he has been Precentor of the Cathedral for a great many years, and if good livings *are* to be given in that sort of way,

which personally I think they should not be, I don't know that the Bishop can be greatly blamed for giving it to him."

"I think they should be given to men who have borne the burden and heat of the day in the poorer livings," said Mrs. Mercer with a sigh, for she had been encouraged to hope, and the hope was now dead. She didn't ask herself why her husband had left her for nearly twenty-four hours without telling her so. There were questions about him occasionally which she refrained from asking herself. She *had* asked him why he seemed so bent upon going over to Surley that afternoon, as they had previously decided to do something else. She would have demurred to going if she had known that this piece of news was to be imparted to Rhoda and Ethel.

The time had come to speak. "Well, Mr. Mercer," said Rhoda, "either Mr. Burgoyne didn't know what he was talking about, or else you misunderstood him. I don't know what you mean by a job; I can't see one in it myself, and I'm quite sure the Bishop wouldn't be capable of such a thing; but he *has* appointed Denis Rector of Surley, and in my opinion, a very good appointment it is."

"And in mine too," said Ethel. She did not add more, because the most interesting thing to do at the moment was to watch the Vicar's face.

There was no room for incredulity, with the announcement made in that fashion. He could only stare. But the quality of his stare was such as to

give Rhoda and Ethel almost as much gratification as they had drawn from the Bishop's letter.

It was a gratification, however, that was broken in upon at once, for Mrs. Mercer, when she had once taken in the announcement, was so beaming and so sincere in her congratulations that they had to be met in something of the same spirit, and the full flavour of the triumph was lost.

The Vicar, also, when he had recovered himself, added his congratulations, and explained away as far as possible his previous unfortunate expressions; explained also that Mr. Burgoyne's assumption had been so near to being a direct statement that he must have been mistaken himself as to the Bishop's intentions. He was listened to with the utmost politeness, but was shown that he had not quite succeeded in wiping away the mark made by the word 'job,' and was left with the impression that if he was not very careful he would hear more of it.

He was not in fact able altogether to hide his chagrin, although he knew well that he was affording satisfaction in showing it. He took his wife away as soon as politeness permitted, and what he said to her on the way home did not add to her happiness in the stroke of good fortune that had come to her friends.

Rhoda and Ethel loudly, and almost indecently, exulted the moment their backs were turned. Really, it was *too* transparent. The man had got over his disappointment at having his own absurd hopes dispelled, and had come with no other purpose than to crow

over them. *She* had let *that* out. Fancy not saying a word to her about it! She was a good little thing herself, and had really *meant* it when she had said she was pleased. She was worth a dozen of him, with his conceit and his spite. Thank goodness there were not many clergymen like *him* in the Church. That sort of spirit did more harm to religion than any other. It would really be almost better to have an evil-liver in a parish. Fancy ever thinking that the Bishop could be taken in by *him*! He knew better than *that*, at any rate. It had been a most painful exhibition, and the sooner it was forgotten the better.

It gave them something to talk about until Denis came home, when they both flew at him with the news, Rhoda brandishing the Bishop's letter. Questions as to what he had been doing, and why he hadn't let them know, could wait.

Denis's surprised displeasure at their action in opening the letter took them aback. In their eagerness to impart the news they had forgotten that there was anything irregular in the way they had obtained it. They were not accustomed to accept criticism from their brother, but whatever excuses may be made to one's self for opening letters addressed to somebody else, when there is strong curiosity to be satisfied, the doing so wears a different aspect when the excuses have to be made to that somebody else. Denis listened gravely to what they had to say, and then went off to his study, and his gravity and silence had this much effect that they did not follow him there, as they

would have thought themselves justified in doing in almost any other circumstances.

Nor did they see him again until they all three met in the drawing-room before dinner.

By that time the effect upon him of their well-meant action might have been expected to have worn off, and they were ready to talk it all over in the way he should have been prepared to do when they had first told him. Really, he looked *quite* like a Rector already, standing up before the fire in his silk waistcoat, with a look of self-possession and dignity that gave them a new idea of him. Perhaps they felt, as they came in together and saw him standing there, that he was, after all, the source from which the importance that was still happily to be theirs was to be drawn, and that the manner in which they had hitherto borne themselves towards him might have to be altered in some respects.

Rhoda dropped a curtsey, and said: "Homage to the Rector of Surley"; and Ethel followed suit.

Denis did not smile. "Have you told anybody of the Bishop's offer?" he said.

Rhoda drew herself together. It was time this rebellious spirit was crushed. "My dear boy," she said, "if you are still nursing a grievance at our having opened the Bishop's letter, which, after all, concerns us as much as it does you, do please get rid of it. It isn't a pretty spirit. You have already shut yourself up for nearly two hours, in which we might have

been talking of the good thing that has happened; and surely that is enough."

He repeated his question. "Have you told anybody of the offer?"

"We told nobody," said Ethel, "as the letter *was* written to you, until Mr. and Mrs. Mercer called this afternoon. He had got it into his head that the living had been offered to Mr. Leadbetter, and came over with no other purpose than to tell us that, and see how we should take it. He hadn't even told his wife. When he had crowed over us enough, of course we had to tell him."

"It would have been impossible to have kept it to ourselves without acting a lie," added Rhoda.

Denis considered this piece of information, and drew away from the fire. "I'm very sorry you told him," he said, with his face half averted from them. "I have already written to refuse the Bishop's offer. I don't feel myself equal yet to the responsibilities of a parish. I want to do some years' hard work in a town first."

After a pause of consternation and incredulity, both sisters set on him at once. How could he possibly have made such a decision? It was really too outrageous. And without giving them the slightest warning! Couldn't he trust the Bishop to know and do what was right? Why on earth hadn't he taken their advice before doing such a thing?

All the scandalised surprise came back to that, and

it was the first thing he answered, when the flood of speech showed signs of abating.

"I didn't tell you," he said, "because I didn't think there was any chance of the offer being made to me, and I wanted to avoid this sort of discussion."

Dinner was announced at that moment, and further discussion had to be put off until the parlour-maid had left them to themselves and their food for a time. The interval had been spent in almost complete silence, all three of them nerving themselves for what was to come.

All three began to speak at the same time, when the maid had shut the door behind her; but it was Denis who continued his speech, his sisters relinquishing theirs to listen to him.

"You ought not to make this difficult for me," he said. "I made up my mind long ago, and I'm sure I was right to do it. I didn't want to tell our dear father, because his ideas on these things were old-fashioned, and I don't think he could have seen it in its true light. But *you* ought to be able to. I'm very sorry for your own disappointment, but you ought to be able to judge a matter like this on higher grounds."

This speech gave them plenty of material, and the sharp attack was renewed. How could he say such a wicked thing about their dear father! And the idea of accusing *them* of thinking about themselves in that worldly way! He must know very well that all their thoughts had been for him, and for the good of

the parish in which they had worked nearly all their lives. Please drop *that* unworthy charge, if he could not see it all in its proper light yet.

There was plenty more of it, and he sat silent and flushed under the attack. But so far it had only stiffened him.

It is difficult for a domineering woman to relinquish the weapons which temperament thrusts into her hands, but they came to see that they could not move him by censure, and they descended to argument, as a half-way house to reasoning, but not without showing annoyance that they were forced to do so.

Surely the Bishop must know better than he what was the right thing to do in a matter like this! Wouldn't it be almost an impertinence to throw the offer back in his face? He could see *that*, couldn't he? And it was not only the Bishop; it was the dying wish of their dear father, which really it was preposterous to set aside as merely old-fashioned. And *they* had no doubt about its being the right thing to accept, whatever their opinion might be worth. Did he really feel justified in going against the opinions of people so much older and wiser than himself?

This was rather more difficult to meet. They were considerations that he had spent much anxious thought over, during the long hour that he had spent by himself. And he could not yet be quite certain that he had solved them in the right way, though he had conscientiously followed the light that was in him. Also, his sisters had established a considerable author-

ity over him, and he was uncomfortable in withstanding them.

But he won through this stage, the contest being occasionally broken into by the intrusions of the maid, and the intervals being spent in bringing up more ammunition for the guns of argument.

He could only decide such a matter on his own conscience, which had given him a strong leading. He was quite sure that the Bishop would respect his decision. Couldn't they accept it now as having been made, and help him in looking forward and preparing for the new work he had undertaken?

This plea seemed to show a slight weakening. They drew from him the admission that his letter of refusal had not yet been posted, and set themselves ardently to induce him to reconsider it. Under the violence of the attack he seemed to waver, though the streak of obstinacy in him, almost more than the weight of his convictions, was all the time stiffening him under the appearance of indecision, which was only the result of not being able to find immediate answers to each and all of their arguments.

The battle moved its scene from the dining-room to the drawing-room, and raged with varying degrees of heat until it was nearly time for family prayers. It flared up hotly when Denis told them that he had spent the night with the Vicar of the London parish of whom he had already accepted a curacy; for he had to admit that he had been in negotiation about it for some time, and they pointed out to him with some truth

that if he had told them of this, instead of keeping it himself as if it were a shameful secret, all the present trouble would have been avoided. And was it *possible* that he had said nothing to the Bishop about it, when he had had that long talk with him, and he had been so kind?

In their offence at having been kept in the dark themselves, they had not at once fastened upon this, the weakest of all places in the young man's armour. Why had he not told the Bishop, in that talk in which the announcement of such a decision would only have drawn the kindest sympathy and the wisest advice? He had asked himself that question many times during the hour he had spent by himself battling with his temptation, and there had been no answer to it for which he could take any credit to himself.

For the temptation of the world, as represented by the Rectory of Surley, had been almost overwhelming, and although he had set in hand his arrangements under the belief that there was little likelihood of its being offered to him, he had not had the courage to make the offer impossible. He had set out to burn his boats by entering into correspondence with the London Vicar, but he had not been able to bring himself to apply the match, and it is doubtful if he would have done so later if he had not spent that evening with the devoted priest who had fired his spiritual ambition afresh. Coming down in the train he had reproached himself greatly for his vacillation, and his boats had flared up behind him in a most illuminating

conflagration. He reproached himself unsparingly for having, as he now saw, desired to gain from the Bishop's views defence for a young man's burying himself at the outset of his career in a comfortable country living, instead of trying to gain from him support for his higher ambitions. But he could not disguise from himself that his lack of frankness must appear most blameworthy to the man to whom in such a talk he had owed frankness above all things, and indeed, as he blushed hotly to think, simulated it.

Well, he had committed a grave fault, and must abide its consequences in lessened estimation of him by the man with whom he would have liked to stand well. But to disguise the fault by taking a reward for it would not help matters, and was an act which, in the sensitive state of conscience he had reached, would be impossible to him. The very fact that he had led the Bishop to imagine that he would be ready to accept the responsibilities and emoluments of Surley now prevented his doing so, more than any other fact.

But it may be imagined how much of this his sisters were able to accept, in their state of irritation and anger against him. They could only see the inexcusable fault, and it seemed to them the strongest reason yet advanced why he should obey their urging.

The poor badgered young man rose from his seat of purgation, saying that it was nearly time for prayers, but that he would rather not conduct them to-

night, not feeling in tune for them, and would go to his study.

Then they fell upon him for wanting to avoid the very thing that would most help him to come to a right decision, and pointed out how very wrong his ideas must be since he could not even face his devotions.

So the servants were summoned, and he read and prayed before his household, and gained some solace and support from doing so.

When prayers were over he said, in a quieter voice than they had permitted him to use during the greater part of the contest, that he could not discuss the question any more. If he had done wrong, as he knew he had, he was now going to do right, and his letter of refusal would be sent to the Bishop the next morning.

CHAPTER V

THE SYSTEM

EXCEPT where his feelings were deeply involved, as they had been in that matter of Beatrix's affair with the Marquis de Lassigny, George Grafton was a man who exercised authority with an easy grace which those who came within its sphere scarcely realised as authority, so much did his wishes seem to comply with their own. His family appeared to possess and to exercise complete liberty of action, and he to fall in with their wishes as much as they with his. But this was because they all loved one another, and they had kept him young between them. If any of them wanted to do anything that he did not care about, he had only to say that he didn't care about it, and they not only didn't do it, but didn't want to do it, because there was nothing so well worth doing as pleasing him. This was in small matters; but there had never been any big difference of desire, except in Beatrix's affair, which he had not handled with his wonted easy detachment. But in the way that had turned out he had proved to have been in the right, in a good many ways which she had not been able to see, and now did see; and his treatment of her during her recovery from love's illness had restored his happy ascendancy, somewhat shaken while the illness had lain heavily upon her.

With his servants and dependants there was never any trouble at all. They liked serving him, and took a pride in serving him well. In business it was the same; but on the rare occasions on which he had had to assert his authority he had done it with a decision that showed his customary easy manner to rest upon strength, and not upon a weak complaisance.

In business negotiation he usually had his way, because he had always made up his mind beforehand what his way was to be, and that it was reasonable that he should have it. By this means he missed the *coups* that come from imposing unreasonable conditions on an opponent, but gained a reputation for fairness and straightness of dealing which made up for it.

He was, in fact, a man of decision and character, under his amiable easy-going exterior, and he was not afraid of a contest, though he preferred not to enter one unless he thought he had a good chance of coming out victor.

It is doubtful, however, whether he had ever entered into one which would provide such a test of his qualities, as when he decided to get rid of the Vicar of Abington—the Reverend A. Salisbury Mercer, M.A.

This was after the commotion occasioned by Denis Cooper's refusal of the living of Surley had died down.

The commotion had been considerable, and a good deal of it had been created by the Vicar of Abington, who really had nothing to do with it at all. Denis had now departed to his curacy in the East End of

London, and his sisters had betaken themselves to the Cathedral City of Medchester, where they had many friends, or at least acquaintances, and their activities could be made use of for the general benefit of their fellow church-people. Mr. Leadbetter had been instituted Rector of Surley, and it was beginning to be known that he had refused the Bishop's offer of the living before it had been made to Denis, but had thought better of it on going over to Surley, and finding that the little church, otherwise undistinguished, possessed a remarkable roof for sound. He was a bachelor, with plenty of money of his own, besides what would come to him from his rectorate, and intended to provide a new organ, and to train a small but exquisite choir to render a full musical service, after the manner of Cathedrals and College Chapels, twice a day.

Grafton unfolded his resolve to Worthing, over the dinner table, when the girls and Miss Waterhouse had left them to their cigars.

"I'm going to get rid of Mercer," he said. "The fellow has become an infernal nuisance, and I'm tired of him."

Worthing stared at him, and laughed. "You can't do it," he said. "I thought you knew better than that. You're the patron of the living, and you appoint a man when it becomes vacant. But once appointed he sticks there till he chooses to go. You've nothing more to do with it than anybody else."

"Oh, I know all that. When I say I'm going to get

rid of him, I don't mean that I've got the power to turn him out. But you can do a good many things that you haven't got that sort of power over, if you go the right way to work."

"Well, I don't care much about Mercer myself, though I've always tried to keep my opinion dark for the sake of peace. He's a tiresome fellow, and that's a fact; but he's never done anything that he could be shifted for. It takes a Bishop all he knows, and a devil of a lot of money besides, to get rid of an incumbent who's a real wrong 'un. There was a case over at Minbrook when I first came here."

"I know that too. But to my mind a quarrelsome back-biting fellow like Mercer does more harm in a community like this than many a man who kicks over the traces in a way to give a handle against himself."

"I quite agree with you there," said Worthing, allowing himself to be diverted to this question of the welfare of a community, which he had much at heart. "I'm glad you take that view of it. It's the right view for a landholder to take, in my opinion. It's up to us who are running a place like this to keep people contented and happy. It's the human side, as I often tell young Bradby. You've got to be just in your dealings, but there are lots of little points where the law seems to give you an unfair advantage. I don't say it does, but it seems to, in the way things are looked at now, with all this Radicalism about. You can run things all right on the old system if you bring goodwill to bear, and remember the people you're deal-

ing with aren't any different to what you are yourself. It seems to me that's the best thing about the old system—the human contact between all parties concerned."

"Well, the parson of a village ought to be the one above all others who makes that contact. What's he there for otherwise?"

"I agree with that too. I'm a good churchman, and all that, and of course the religious side of it is important. But to my mind it's more important still that he should be the friend of all his people, rich and poor alike, so that they can go to him for anything, and find a friend in him."

"That *is* the religious side of it, isn't it?"

"I suppose it ought to be. But the parsons nowadays seem to want to run a country parish as they would a town one. We don't see much of it hereabouts, except with Brill, and he's kept in order by Lady Mansergh. Brill's a nice kind-hearted fellow too, and if it wasn't for all that high falutin' church business, and changing all the services from what they've been accustomed to, and shoving them off their perches generally, he'd do as well as any country parson. Take a man like Williams. He's a good deal more interested in his dogs and his carpentering than he is in his church services, I should say. I don't want to hold him up as a perfect example, but he's the friend of all his parishioners. Beckley's a close-fisted landlord, and doesn't get on particularly well with his tenants. But Williams often does them a good turn with

him. He's a *human* sort of fellow. That's what I like about Williams."

"And that's just what Mercer isn't."

Worthing had rather forgotten about Mercer, and his inclination to make the best of people and give everybody a chance was strong in him. He frowned slightly. "He's cantankerous," he said. "I can't deny that."

"Yes, he's cantankerous, and a good many other things besides. There's hardly a soul round about—of our sort, I mean—that he hasn't fallen out with. When I first came here he warned me against the whole lot of them, without exception."

"Did he? Well, he oughtn't to have done that. I don't believe you'd find a nicer lot of people; take 'em all round, anywhere in England."

"That's what you told me, on the same day as he'd said the opposite, and I'm more inclined to your opinion than his. Then he makes trouble in the place itself. My girls and Miss Waterhouse are finding that out constantly. There's always a lot of quarrelling going on, and if you follow it up you generally find he has had a finger in the pie."

"Well, I can't deny that either. I've often had to smooth over things that he has put wrong. He *is* a tiresome fellow, and there's no denying it. It would certainly be a good thing for the parish if he were got rid of. Still he hasn't done anything that he could be got rid of for, and I don't see how you're going to bring it about."

"I'm going to ask him to go."

Worthing stared and laughed again. "I should like to be there when you do it," he said.

"I don't think you would. If you thought I was getting the better of him you'd want to take his part. That's what you're made like."

"Oh, I don't know about that. But I do like to keep the peace."

"If we can persuade Mr. Mercer to take himself off, I hope we shall get somebody here who'll help you. We'd better go up to the girls now. They'll be wanting their bridge."

When the Vicar walked up to the Abbey the next morning in answer to Grafton's note requesting an interview, it was with anticipations not unpleasurable. Somehow, he had never succeeded in gaining the footing of intimacy with his chief parishioners that he felt to be his due. It was even some weeks now since he had been invited to the house, and he had felt aggrieved about it, because in his position he ought to have been the most frequent guest at the only other house in the place occupied by such people as himself.

It had not always been so. On the Graftons' first arrival he had felt himself free to run in and out of the house on the most intimate terms, and had always been sure of a welcome, as was only right and proper. It had begun to steal over him lately, in wafts of cold suspicion, which he had put away from him whenever they approached, that his welcome had perhaps never been quite so warm as he had taken for granted. He

had also begun to suspect that certain criticisms he had passed upon the Graftons—of course without meaning anything by them—might have come to their ears, and accounted for the cessation of invitations, to lunch and to dine, which had never failed even after the running in and out showed itself to be not quite what they wanted. But this suspicion had stiffened him against them. If they proved themselves difficult to get on with, as so many people in this part of the world unfortunately did, he was not the man to give in to them. He had his own position of dignity and responsibility and would take his stand unflinchingly upon that. It was the duty of a Squire and a parson to keep on good terms with one another for the sake of example, especially when the people of a parish were so quarrelsome and difficult to manage as they were at Abington. He had done all he could to bring that happy state of things about. If the other party was blind to the advantages, nay to the Christian duty, of such an understanding, then he must pursue his course unflinchingly apart. On no account would he knuckle under, and debase his sacred profession.

Still, he had no *wish* to quarrel, and it was somewhat of a relief to be asked to a consultation with Grafton, no doubt upon some measure of importance in connection with the parish. There had been far too little of that co-operation. A Squire might do so much to help a parson in his devoted labours for the good of the community, and Grafton had done so little, though on his first coming the Vicar had had

strong hopes that here was at last a man who would back him up, in his spiritual duties, as he in his turn was only too anxious to give help and advice, in *all* matters, in return.

But in spiritual matters he had even been denied what was undoubtedly his due. Grafton had not even come to church regularly, nor put pressure on his household to do so. The last was inexcusable. The Vicar could make allowances for a man in Grafton's position who worked in London, though not very regularly, and looked upon his days in the country as holidays. But his servants ought to be *made* to come to church. The Vicar had felt so strongly about this that he had once told Grafton so, and pointed out that he himself was always there in fair weather or foul. Grafton had said that most of his servants did attend church regularly, and none of them kept away altogether, and had not been able to see that that was not the point. And pressed to exercise his authority he had refused to do so.

Then there was that point of Barbara's confirmation. Miss Waterhouse had asked him the previous year whether he should be holding confirmation classes, and he had said that he should, for the Advent confirmation, but only for the young people of the village, and that of course Barbara could not be expected to attend them. He had offered, at the sacrifice of his own valuable time to prepare Barbara for confirmation by herself, and Miss Waterhouse had thanked him, but had put the matter off. Then when

the time had drawn near, and he had raised the question, he had been told that Barbara would not be confirmed that year at all. They would be in London after Christmas and she would be confirmed in the spring, at the church where her sisters had been. But they had not moved to London after Christmas, and Barbara had not been confirmed. He had asked about it and received an evasive answer.

He was thinking of this, and getting nettled about it, as he walked through the park to the Abbey, when it suddenly occurred to him that this was probably what Grafton wanted to see him about. Well, if it was, that would put a good many things right. He would pocket the offence that he had felt and had been *right* in feeling, at having had his offer treated in the fashion it had been, and would renew it. Barbara was a very interesting child—she was seventeen, and ought to have been confirmed long ago—and he would enjoy his talks with her. By the time he reached the house he was convinced that it was Barbara's religious education that Grafton wished to see him about.

He was received in the long, low library, with its ranks of mellow russet books which no one ever read, its raftered ceiling, and its latticed windows. It was the room which Grafton called his, but seldom used except for business purposes or when men were staying in the house. He was writing at a table at the far end of the room when the Vicar was announced, and came forward to greet him at once with his pleas-

ant friendly air. It was no part of his intention to antagonise him.

The Vicar began the conversation. "I wondered, as I came up," he said in his pompous but would-be-intimate manner, "whether it was about Barbara's confirmation you wanted to talk to me. She really ought to have been confirmed last year, and the intention was that she should be this spring, wasn't it? There will be a confirmation either here or at Feltham later on in the year, and I shall be very pleased to prepare her for it if you wish it. I could come here once or twice a week, or she could come to me, whichever you preferred."

Grafton was about to refuse, rather shortly, when he bethought himself.

"Are you going to have a confirmation class?" he asked.

"Oh, yes. But I shouldn't expect her to attend that. It's for the boys and girls of the village. There are one or two farmers' daughters this year, but nobody of the same class as Barbara. You couldn't—"

"What has class got to do with it?" Grafton interrupted him. "I should have thought in a matter like that everybody was equal."

"Oh, well, if you take it like that!" said the Vicar. "I think so, of course, but—"

"What should you teach her?" asked Grafton.

"What should I teach her?" He seemed somewhat at a loss. "I shouldn't teach her any Roman doctrine, if that's what you're thinking of. Good Prayer

Book doctrine, you know. At confirmation you take upon yourself the vows that others have made for you in your Baptism. You'll find it all in the Prayer Book. Careful preparation deepens the spiritual life, at a time when the young soul is at its most malleable, and open to religious impressions. It is a very blessed opportunity."

He spoke with unction. Grafton looked as if he were suffering from a slight nausea. "I don't care a bit about doctrine," he said. "I do believe in Christianity, and I think I recognise its spirit when I see it. I see it in my daughter Caroline. She hasn't a thought in her head that isn't sweet and good. She never thinks of herself when there's anybody else to think of. She does everybody good all round her, by just being herself."

The Vicar rather enjoyed theological discussion. "That's an interesting point of view," he said. "And a very natural one. I admire Caroline myself—enormously. But I should say hers was a natural goodness. Very beautiful, of course, and something to thank God for; but not of *itself* religious."

"Why not?"

"Perhaps I should say not of *itself* Christian. You may observe the same sort of goodness in people who don't follow the Christian religion—in Buddhists and so forth. In the Christian religion we are taught to look for Grace, and—"

"Oh, well, grace or goodness—it's the same thing. I won't go on with this; I didn't ask you to be good

enough to come and see me to talk about Barbara's confirmation. I shouldn't want you to prepare her. It's yourself I want to talk about. You're not very comfortable here at Abington, are you? You don't care for the people round you, and you find it difficult to get on with the villagers."

The Vicar's mouth opened. "I don't understand you," he said.

"I know that as patron of this living I've no sort of authority over the man who holds it, or anything of that sort; but I might be able to ease the wheels a bit if you saw your way to exchanging it for another. I believe such things are done. I don't know whether you've ever thought about it."

The Vicar was still at a loss. "The living is certainly not much of a prize," he said, with a laugh. "It couldn't be held except by a man with private means of his own—considerable private means. If you had any idea of raising the endowment—"

"Well, I might do that—or add to the income, or whatever it might be, for a man who could make himself happy here, and get on with us all. I won't beat about the bush, Mercer. You seem to have got at loggerheads with everybody here, and it's no more comfortable for us than it is for you. You haven't fallen out with us yet, but I can't help feeling it may come any time. If I could do anything to make it easy for you to get away from a place where you don't find congenial society, we could part on good terms now, and it might save trouble in the future."

The Vicar now understood that the proposal was not to raise the endowment of the living for his own benefit. He had not yet grasped the fact that he was being invited to quit.

"I can only say that if you and I fall out it won't be my fault," he said. "It's quite true that the people round here—your sort of people, I mean—are a cantankerous lot."

"Well, I don't find them so, Mercer. I don't find them so."

He did not like being contradicted in this resolute fashion. "I'm afraid we must agree to differ on that point then," he said stiffly.

"It's the *whole* point, Mercer. It isn't only one or two you've managed to fall out with; that might happen to anybody, though if sensible people manage to fall out with their neighbours they generally manage to fall in again sooner or later. It's the whole lot. When we first came here you warned me against every single family about here we were likely to make friends with, except two. And you've fallen out with them since."

He now understood that he was being brought to book, and he liked that less than anything. He grew red and gobbled like a turkey cock before he spoke.

"This is a most unwarrantable attack," he said. "Did you ask me to come here to receive a lecture from you, Mr. Grafton?"

"I asked you to come here to see if we couldn't come to some mutual understanding that needn't re-

flect upon you if we can do so. My reasons for wanting a change made are likely to be painful to you, I know, and probably surprising as well. But I must state them if anything is to come of it. So I do so as directly as possible. If you'll accept them, and talk it over on the grounds that I should like a change made, so much the better. Then we needn't go over the reasons any more."

"You'd like a change made." He understood it now, and summoned all his powers of resistance, and resentment. "And you really think, Mr. Grafton, that because you've bought this property, and live in the biggest house on it, you can order things in that way. Let me tell you that there is one house in this parish that you have *not* bought, and that is my humble Vicarage. You have no more right to dispose of that than you have of—of the Bishop's Palace at Medchester. You—"

"Can't we talk over things reasonably, Mercer? If I thought I had that sort of power, I should make some attempt to exercise it, shouldn't I? I shouldn't be asking you if we can't come to some understanding."

"And what understanding on such a subject is possible, I should like to know. You want me to go; that's the plain truth of the matter. Do you think I'm not a fit person to exercise my duties here, may I ask?"

Grafton was silent, with a silence that was significant.

There was a drop in the temperature. "For my own satisfaction this must be cleared up," said the Vicar, speaking with dignified restraint. "If you have any charges to bring against me I must know what they are, so that I can meet them in the open."

"There are no charges, Mercer, to be met in that way. I've told you already why I should like a change made, if you can bring yourself to consider it. It isn't only the people of our own sort, as you say, that you don't get on with. You're at loggerheads with half your parishioners at one time or another. My girls are always coming across it, wherever they go. They're keen—Caroline is especially—to make friends with the people in the place, and for us who live here in a certain relation with them to do what we can for them. It's one of the pleasures of land-holding to be given that sort of opportunity. We've all of us come to see that. I believe we should be as happy and contented a community as you'd find anywhere, if—well, if it weren't for you, Mercer. I don't want to be offensive, but that's what it comes to."

The Vicar was trembling with anger. "But this is outrageous," he exclaimed.

"Oh, I don't think so," said Grafton easily. "I've no wish to offend you, but it seems to me that the state of things I want here is worth taking that risk for. I tell you plainly that you seem to me such a difficulty in the way of it that if you go on here I can't continue to offer you the friendship of myself and my family. In ordinary life, if a man you know is continually

acting in a way you don't like, you drop his acquaintance, or if it's necessary you fight him. I don't want to fight you, and I don't suppose you want to fight me. I've said enough to show you that I've reasons which seem to me important for wanting to come to the understanding with you that I've indicated. I don't want to argue about them, or to push them in. They're there. I'll ask you to think over what I've said. Anything I can do to make it advantageous and agreeable to you to find some other place to work in, I will do; and if you decide to go, well, as far as people outside will be able to see, you and we will part as friends, and you'll be going, of course, of your own free will."

He rose from his chair, and the Vicar rose at the same time. He had an enormous amount to say, but found it difficult to say it as Grafton walked down the long room, opened the door for him, and accompanied him through the dining-room into the hall.

"It wants thinking over, I know," said Grafton, taking no notice of his beginnings of sentences. "You can't decide this sort of thing in a hurry. If you and Mrs. Mercer will come and dine with us to-morrow night, you and I could have a friendly talk about it afterwards and see if there's anything to be done. Caroline will write Mrs. Mercer a note."

The Vicar was on the doorstep, still striving for speech. Grafton said good-bye to him, and returned to the library.

CHAPTER VI

THE VICAR'S DECISION

GRAFTON didn't tell Caroline to write her note of invitation to Mrs. Mercer until the next morning. It was sent to the Vicarage by hand, with instructions to the bearer to wait for an answer.

Mrs. Mercer took it into her husband's study. In the ordinary way she would have done this with some expression of gaiety and pleasure, for she took such variations of life as happy surprises, and could be moved to excitement even by an invitation to a flower-show, with a garden party attached.

But this time her face did not light up as she opened and read the note, and only the thought of the waiting messenger sent her to her husband's room at once.

"Here is an invitation from Caroline for us to dine at the Abbey to-night," she said, with a grave face. "Do you wish me to accept it?"

The Vicar was very busy. He looked up from his writing as if he could hardly detach his thoughts from what he was doing, and said: "What is to-night? Thursday. There's nothing on, I think. Yes, accept it." Then he turned to his writing again.

Mrs. Mercer wrote her answer and sent it out. When she had done so she sat with a thoughtful look upon her face for some time, which gradually changed to

one of decision. Then she went in to her husband's study again, and shut the door after her as if she meant to stay there. This was unusual. She was not made to feel herself welcome in that room in the morning hours.

She was not to be made welcome now. The Vicar had left his writing-table and was walking up and down the room, with a look on his face that was not pleasant to see. It didn't grow any more pleasant as he saw her shut the door behind her with that air which meant that she had something serious to say to him. "My dear, you're just interrupting me in a train of thought," he said in an annoyed voice. "If you want to talk about anything do please wait until lunch time, or at least until the post comes. I shall have a few minutes to spare then."

For answer she sat herself down in a high-backed chair which stood by the empty fireplace. "Albert," she said, "I must speak to you. Things are wrong with us all round, and I am kept out of it all. If I am to be a true wife to you, and stand by your side in all the difficulties and troubles which come to us with the people round, I ought to know what is going on, and not be kept in the dark, as you always keep me."

Tears stood in the little lady's eyes. She had been such a good loyal wife to him, putting all her money at his disposal, and allowing him to treat it as if it were his own, and even as if she ought to be thankful to him for the comfortable home that he could not have

given her himself. She had never felt any disturbance of mind on that score, and did not feel any now. They were one, and hers was his. But for the trust and obedience she had given him, never questioning his wisdom, nor failing to take his side in the repeated disputes and estrangements that had come about between them and their neighbours, he did owe her return. The time had come when she could no longer go on putting her whole trust in him, if he did not show some corresponding trust in her.

He stopped in his walking up and down, and stood before her, the arrogant frown and look on his face which she knew so well. But something now told her that she must not be awed into submission by it, as previously she had always been.

"Really, I don't understand you," he said. "You must leave me to conduct my own affairs in my own way, as you have always done. You can help me in the difficulties I have in my work—and they are heavy enough, God knows, with the sort of people I have to deal with here—by giving me peace and quietness in my own home. You can help me in no other way. The troubles I have fall upon my own shoulders, and I am acting rightly by you in trying to keep you unaffected by them."

"But they do not only fall upon you," she said quietly. "We make friends with people, and everything seems to be going happily; and then suddenly we are not friends any longer. Often I have had to find it out for myself, and sometimes you don't even tell

me what has happened to cause the change. It was so with the Beckleys. I have never known why we left off being friends with them. And I have never known why there was such disturbance before Mollie Walter was married. It would have been natural, as she was almost like your own daughter, as you so often used to say, that she should have been married from here, and that Mrs. Walter should have stayed on at the Cottage until after she was married. But her house at Wilborough was hurried on for her so that Mollie could be married from there, and you were not even asked to take part in the ceremony."

He had resumed his pacing of the room during the progress of this speech, and his look was not so arrogant as it had been.

"I certainly don't propose to go into old questions of that sort," he said. "They are over and done with, and—"

"I don't wish to go into them either," she said. "I didn't press you to take me into your confidence then, and I won't do it now. But I think you ought to tell me what has been the trouble with the Graftons. You have criticised them from time to time, as you criticise everybody,"—he frowned at this sentence, which was unlike any she had ever used to him—"but we have been on friendly terms with them for over a year. At first we were on *very* friendly terms with them, and you used to go to the Abbey in just the same way as you used to run in and out of Stone Cottage. They have always been as nice as possible to me, but I couldn't

help seeing that they were not as friendly towards you as they had been. When you left off going there in the intimate way you did at first, they still asked us to the house fairly often. But this invitation to dinner to-night is the first we have had from them for weeks."

He did not usually allow her to speak at this length without interrupting her, but when you are brought to book about anything it is as well to know exactly what you have to meet. It may not after all be so difficult to meet it as you had anticipated.

It was with something like his customary tone that he said: "We have often discussed the Graftons together, and you know well enough that there are many things about them which I, as a priest of the Church, cannot approve of. If there has been any decline of intimacy between us it is for that reason and that reason alone. They are not what I thought they were when they first came here, and though in the position in which I stand towards them I must do my best to keep the peace for the good of the parish, I shall not surrender one jot or tittle of what I stand for here, for the sake of keeping in with the rich man of the parish."

It sounded very well to him, but she rather spoilt it by asking in a quiet voice: "What do you stand for here, Albert?"

Whether or not the necessity of explaining to her the whole gist and meaning of the Ordination Service withheld him from replying to her at once, she had time to go on before he spoke.

“I haven’t been able to prevent myself asking that question lately,” she said. “I was very much troubled by the way you behaved”—another phrase to which his ears were quite unaccustomed from her—“about the Coopers. When you thought that the Bishop had offered Surley to Mr. Leadbetter you didn’t tell me anything about it, but you took me over there so that you might tell *them*, though you knew what disappointment it would bring them. Then when they told you that the living had been offered to Denis, you congratulated them, but you spoke in such a different way to me as we came home; and you did your best to stir up trouble about it before you knew that Denis had refused the offer. And even when that did come out, you couldn’t give him any credit for what was a fine action on his part, as I think, but could only talk about the way his sisters were served right in doing what they had, and put it about what they had done, to discredit them.”

The Vicar had in fact arrived at the conclusion that Rhoda and Ethel had opened the Bishop’s letter addressed to their brother, which it is probable that no one else would have guessed at; and righteous indignation at such an action had been his chief contribution to the talk that had resulted from the Bishop’s offer and its refusal. It was somewhat disturbing to find that his wife had not taken that indignation at its face value. He defended himself at some length against her charge of uncharity, but her silence and her downcast look warned him that he was not impressing her, and

as the ground was not of the strongest he relinquished it.

“But we will have an end to all this,” he said, catching at his authority, so unexpectedly being questioned. “I can quite see that my silence as to the Graftons may have been misunderstood by you. The fact is that for months I have been coming to see that my position here will become impossible unless the Graftons refrain from meddling in affairs which are my concern and not theirs. I went down to the Abbey yesterday to have it out with Grafton once and for all. Either I must be allowed my own way here in matters which appertain to my office, and that must be definitely understood, or else I must fight for it, and all pretence of intimacy and friendship must be abandoned between us. Matters have come to a crisis. I found Grafton quite irreconcilable. He takes his stand, as a rich man of that type always does, upon his money.”

“Oh, Albert!” she exclaimed.

“I don’t mean to say, of course, that he mentions his money, but it comes down to that. He has bought this place, and imagines that he has bought all the people who live in it body and soul. I told him very plainly that he had not bought me, and that I was not for sale, and I flatter myself that I have given him something to think about. I was at first very angry, as you no doubt saw when I came home, but I have been thinking long and earnestly too. If you had not come in just now with a series of accusations which are really

quite unjustified and exceptionally painful in the midst of a crisis of this sort, I should have told you in a very short time where my deliberations had led me. They are serious enough, and as you are concerned in the matter as well as myself, I should have consulted you before making any actual decision. But I feel that I can no longer go on here under such conditions. The work I have spent some of the best years of my life over is made of no avail, and to go on with it would only be to invite further failure. Better face all the distress of a complete break, and the expense of a move, and get away from the place. I had almost made up my mind to do that, and if you give me your concurrence I shall take the step without further hesitation. You know that when Sherlock sent the photograph of that charming little house at Darthead, which he was prepared to put at the disposal of anybody who would go and help him there, you said you wished we were in a position to go ourselves. Well, let us go, I say. It will mean some sacrifice of means, and I shall not be the ultimate authority at Darthead, as I have been here. But there will be less to keep up, and with an older man than he had anticipated getting, Sherlock would only be too glad to give a free hand. In fact he said that if he could get somebody whom he could thoroughly trust, he should try to get away for a year at least, and leave his curate in complete charge. Are you ready to make this new departure with me, Gertrude, and support me loyally in my reasons for making it?"

By the time he had come to the end of this speech, he had forgotten the beginning. But she had not, and a proposal that otherwise would have found her enthusiastic, for she liked change, and the photograph of the house at Darthead had pleased her enormously, left her for the time unmoved. For his account of his interview with Grafton by no means tallied with certain facts in her own possession.

His representation of himself as disapproving of the Graftons to such an extent that he had finally been forced to deliver an ultimatum was one of them. He had overwhelmed them with censure when he had thought he had anything to complain about, but any approach on their part to intimacy had always been responded to by him, and it was only when it showed signs of dropping again that he had reverted to his attitude of disapproval. That disapproval had certainly increased during the last few months, in which the intimacy had been withheld, but he had shown himself almost delighted to receive Grafton's note asking him to come and see him, and had certainly not gone down to the Abbey with any idea of delivering an ultimatum. He had returned in what was almost a fury, and she had sat silent and depressed while he had covered the whole Grafton family with abuse, but had not told her anything of what the new trouble was about; nor had she asked him. And yet he had made no difficulty about her accepting Caroline's invitation to dinner that evening. No doubt he had persuaded himself of the truth of what he was saying,

even as he said it, as his way was. But it carried no conviction to her.

"I think," she said quietly, "that it would be better for us to go away from here if we cannot keep friends with any one about us."

Something warned him not to take exception to this speech, or to expatiate further upon the offences he had received. "We can put all that behind us now," he said. "I have not been able to make headway against the forces arrayed against me here, and it will be better for us to start entirely afresh. There is no need to keep up any ill-feeling against even the Graftons. That is why we can dine with them to-night, on the old friendly terms. If I had not decided to leave the place we should have been obliged to refuse their invitation. I think you will find no unpleasantness there, if you do and say nothing to arouse it yourself. When they hear we are going, perhaps they may even be rather sorry. Whoever comes here after me—Grafton will have to find somebody himself, and I wish him luck of the job, for a living of this value—I don't think he will easily find a more devoted parish priest than I have been, or a Vicar's wife more ready to do her duty than *you* have been, my dear."

This tribute, thoroughly deserved but so rarely paid by him, did not bring instant grateful delighted response from her, as usually it would have done. Her eyes had been forced open, and could not be closed again by a careless word of compliment. She knew that even in his last speech he had not spoken the en-

tire truth to her. His easy words, and his sudden changes, for which there was always a reason, but a reason that would not stand any test of sincerity, sounded different to her now. Would she ever be persuaded and convinced by them again?

He hardly knew how much of truth and how much of falsehood there was in his words himself. Although he had played lightly with the idea of going to Dart-head—his friend had asked him if he knew of a curate, but it was not certain that he would accept the offer he would make of himself, or that he had not by this time found one—all his thoughts had been taken up with the fight he was going to have with Grafton. It was to have begun that very evening over Grafton's dinner table, with a statement of exactly where he stood that should be unmistakeable. Yesterday he had been unprepared, but now he had his speeches ready; he had been rehearsing some of them when his wife had come in to him. Grafton would knuckle under; men of the Vicar's temperament never allow for answers to the speeches they compose beforehand.

He had not projected his mind clearly into the future, as to what should happen after he had gained his victory. Grafton had said that if he stayed on at Abington he should no longer treat him as a friend. Perhaps he imagined him so overcome by his defeat that he would hardly dare to hold aloof from him. Perhaps a little whisper of reason in a corner of his mind prepared him for that complete revulsion of feeling which came to him under his wife's unex-

pected attack, and made him as eager to escape the contest, and to go, as a few minutes earlier he had been to engage in it and to stay on immovable.

He had hardly had time to gauge the importance of her change of attitude towards him. He had not been able to beat down her awkward enquiries into his conduct as previously he had always nipped the mildest of protests from her, and kept his dominance over her. But he was far from suspecting that his reign of unreason was over. She had gone farther in questioning, and even criticising him, than ever before, but he only had to treat her with a little more care to bring her to his feet again, accepting and for the most part admiring everything that he said or did.

But another little whisper of caution from a corner of his mind warned him that he had better cut the knot of the difficulties which had at last aroused that spirit of revolt in her, get away from it all, and start afresh. His mind swung round instantly to a strong desire to get away from it all, and with credit to himself. Before he had finished the speech in which he broached his new-found intention to her, he saw himself leaving Abington with the warmly expressed regrets of his parishioners in his ears; and, if the vision of an illuminated address and a handsome piece of plate did not present itself to him quite so early, it did later.

The next morning Grafton went down to his Estate Office in the village to see Worthing. They had a little business to transact together. When it had been finished Grafton said, "By the bye, the Mercers dined

with us last night. They brought rather a surprising piece of news. Mercer has made up his mind that he has borne the heat and burden of the day in Abington long enough. He is going to retire, and live in Devonshire—in a village where he can do a little clerical work for a friend.”

Worthing stared at him open-mouthed, and then laughed heartily. “By Jove, you’re a wonder,” he said. “How did you do it?”

“How did I do what? I don’t know what you’re talking about. I’m telling you about Mercer. It’s a charming house they’re going to. Mrs. Mercer brought a photograph of it. Mercer doesn’t want to live in idleness. Though he’s borne the burden and heat of the day in this humming hive of population, he still feels he has a few more years of work in him for the good of the community. He isn’t going to be a curate exactly; he’s going to help his friend, if he doesn’t fall out with him—but he didn’t say that.”

“Is he really going, or are you pulling my leg?”

“Why should I pull your leg? He’s going next month. He’s already looking about for somebody to get up a testimonial to him. He didn’t tell me that either, but I gathered it. He hoped there’d be no fuss. He’d prefer to say good-bye to his friends and go quietly—no illuminated addresses, or anything of that sort. But I gathered that he won’t refuse one if it is offered. I rather fancy he has you in his mind, James, as the right person to see about it.”

“I’m damned if I do,” said Worthing.

CHAPTER VII

A MORNING RIDE

CAROLINE and her father rode out very early one morning at the beginning of June. One of the habits they had formed was to seize to themselves the delicious freshness of the new day, unspoilt by the smoke and stir of towns.

She and he were alone at the Abbey. After more than a year in which the London house had scarcely been used, they were beginning to discuss the advisability of giving it up altogether. They discussed it now as they rode across the dewy grass of the park, on their way to the high ground which would bring them to their favourite view across miles of southward facing country to the sea.

"You see, darling," Caroline was saying, "we always want to be here when we are there, and we very seldom want to be there when we are here. Beatrix generally stays with Aunt Katharine or Aunt Mary, anyhow, and you like staying at your Club if you have to go up alone. Now that Barbara has gone to Paris the Dragon won't have to be in London to look after her, as we thought she must if she went up for classes."

"And what about you, Cara? You shirked most of your London gaieties last year. Are you going to cut yourself off from them altogether?"

She laughed happily. "Fancy wanting London gaieties when you can have this!" she said. "I sang for joy this morning when I woke up and found myself here instead of in London."

"Yes, that's all very well," he said. "I feel like that myself, though I suppose that at my age no satisfaction is quite as hilarious as it is at yours. But it isn't only the gaieties that you miss by cutting yourself off from London. It's being in the swim. When you've been in the swim as long as I have, you know how much of it is necessary to you and how much isn't. And you don't lose all that you've gained for yourself when you begin to sit lightly to it all. But you have to gain it first."

"I'm not sure that I want to gain more than I have," she said. "I have heaps of friends, and we see a good many of them down here. I like seeing those who really do count in that way; you get to know them better. It's the background of life that I love so in the country. You belong to yourself more. Things come to you and you don't have to go out to find them. I believe you feel that too, Daddy."

"Yes, I do," he said, "more than I should have thought possible a year ago. But still I can't see that it is quite the right thing for you to bury yourself down here entirely."

"Don't you feel that it's nice to have me here to welcome you when you come home?" she asked.

"Oh, my darling," he said, "nothing could be better—for me. It's you I'm thinking of."

Barbara had been sent off, protesting, to a 'family' in Paris a fortnight before. She was to come home in August, when Young George would also come home for his summer holidays; otherwise she had declared she would not consent to go at all. Beatrix was in London with Lady Handsworth, enjoying her second season, but not with quite the same youthful abandon as she had enjoyed her first. Miss Waterhouse was away visiting, but would come back shortly, either to Abington or to the house in Cadogan Place, wherever the headquarters of the family should be. Caroline after a week in London had pressed for Abington, and had had her own way. It was true that her way would bring most pleasure to her father. His centre of gravity had changed from London to the country. Except on occasions, his work occupied him not more than three days a week, and with her at Abington his home was indisputably there, as it would not have been otherwise. But he was getting to be a little anxious about this increasing disinclination of hers to follow out the life that seemed natural for a girl of her birth and upbringing. Both his sisters-in-law had spoken to him about it, Lady Grafton as well as Lady Handsworth. She was not doing herself justice. They knew that he did not want to give her up, and there was no necessity for her to marry just yet. But she ought not to cut herself off from the surroundings in which girls of her sort did find husbands, the surroundings in which he himself, and all of them, had found wives and husbands.

He had felt the force of this. Though he hoped to keep Caroline with him for a time longer, the thought of her eventual marriage was never quite absent from his thoughts about her. He did not want it to be, necessarily, what is called a brilliant marriage, though with a girl of Caroline's beauty and charm the most brilliant of marriages would not be more than her due; but he did want her to marry among the people with whom both sides of her family had been connected now for some generations past, and that was conditional, as it seemed to him, upon her keeping 'in the swim.' There was an idea at the back of his mind that her whole-hearted love of a country life was rather unsettling her for the right sort of marriage. It seemed actually to have been responsible for her unwillingness to accept the young man whom for some time past he had thought, not without satisfaction, that she might marry. Francis Parry was still in love with her, and a year ago she had refused him in such a way as not to have made him relinquish all hope of winning her. The young man had told Grafton so rather pathetically not so long before. He had not bothered her, he had said, but wasn't she getting tired of shutting herself away from everybody? Was his chance absolutely gone?

The question had made Grafton bethink himself. When Caroline had definitely refused Francis for the second time a year before he had been well content to have it so. She had said that she had always liked him, and given her father to understand that when she

should be ready to marry he would be such a husband as she would choose. It was because she was so happy at home that she did not want to marry yet. But now he was not so sure that it would be a man of the type of Francis Parry whom she would choose. She seemed to have moved away from the sort of life he represented, which was exactly the sort of life that he himself had represented, and to which his daughters had been brought up. The fact that he had refrained hitherto with her from any reference to the young man's plea, although they had talked him over together frankly enough before, showed the extent of his doubts about her. Although he sympathised with her strong preference for this quiet stay-at-home country life, and to a large extent shared it, it seemed almost as if she were moving away from him.

They came to the high beechwood from which the famous view was to be seen. They sat on their horses, and drank in the tonic air which came from the sea across miles of open country. The sun was now high in the sky, and a line of silver in the far distance fulfilled their expectations. For in most conditions of atmosphere the view of the sea was by faith and not by sight.

"Isn't it heavenly!" said Caroline. "Oh, Dad, you must leave me to this; I want to live all my life with it. I shouldn't mind if I never saw London again."

They were going to breakfast at Grays, the seat of the Pemberton family. Bertie Pemberton, the only

son, had married a few months before Mollie Walter, who had lived with her mother in a cottage at Abington. He also had forsaken London, to settle down to a country existence for the rest of his life. It had been necessary for him 'to do something' before succeeding to the parental acres, and the something he had chosen to do, after enjoying himself for three years at Oxford, was dealing with stocks and shares. This pursuit would appear to be singularly fitted for a young man with connections but no exaggerated equipment of brain power. But he was a countryman at heart, as had been all his forebears. A few years 'in the City' were his tribute to the larger life. Upon marriage he was quite content to close that chapter. There was enough for him to do with the management of his father's estate as a serious occupation, and with the sports of the field as one hardly less serious.

An old stone-roofed farmhouse, restored and refitted to make it a suitable home for an heir-apparent, was now Mollie's habitation. It stood a little way back from the road, and as Grafton and Caroline rode up she came flying down the flagged path from the house door to greet them. She was like a vision of the summer morning in her sparkling bridal happiness. Caroline embraced her warmly when she had dismounted, with more emotion than she could have expressed. The happiness of others is a moving thing, especially when it rests upon love; and Mollie was supremely happy. Her husband, with a loud-voiced geniality which showed him at least to have nothing to com-

plain of in life, followed her out and added his welcome. Thereafter there was talk and laughter, pride of new possession and sympathy with it, until it was time for the Graftons to ride home again.

"Isn't it lovely to see them so pleased with themselves?" Caroline said, when she had waved her last farewell. "Do you remember Mollie a year ago, how shy and retiring she was? She is like a different creature now."

"Master Bertie is a different creature too," said her father. "He's always been noisy, but I like the sort of noise he makes now better than I did."

"He adores Mollie," said Caroline, "and she is just the wife for him. I love to see them together. You see, Dad, it isn't necessary to fag about in London as a preparation for marriage. Mollie has hardly ever been there."

She seemed to have divined his inmost thoughts, and her speech surprised him a little. "Have you been thinking about that?" he asked.

"No," she said. "I'm quite happy with you, darling, if only you will leave me peacefully to look after you at Abington."

Her words gave him pleasure, but his conscience was aroused about her. "Lord knows I am happy enough to have you," he said. "But I can't keep you for ever. You'll want what Mollie has some day."

"Some day," she said. "Yes. But I have all I want for the present."

"What about Francis?" he asked, after a short

pause. "He wants you as much as ever. He told me so."

She looked troubled. "I know he does," she said. "He told me so too."

He waited for her to go on.

"I like him as much as ever," she said, "for what he is."

"For what he is!" he echoed.

"What he is isn't what I want now," she said, not without hesitation. "It would be different if I were in love with him, as I suppose he is with me,—poor Francis! If I felt like that I should not mind what I did or where I went with him."

"My dear child, you talk as if he'd take you out to the wilds. You'd live where you liked, within reach of London. He has to stick to it closer than I do, at present. You couldn't live right away, like this. But—"

"Oh, it wouldn't be the same," she said. "But it isn't that, Dad. I don't love him. I thought I might, perhaps, last year, enough to live whatever life he liked with him. But now I know I never can. He isn't what I want."

"What do you want?" he asked, throwing a glance at her.

"Only you, darling," she said lightly. "Don't worry me about Francis. I'm worried about him a little myself, because I do like him, and we're friends. But he'll get over it, and find somebody else. I'm heart-free, Dad. Really I am. I love you and B,

and Barbara and Bunting, and the Dragon, and every single soul who lives at Abington, except Lord Salisbury; and he's going soon. When I begin to love somebody else I'll let you know. I don't suppose you'll have me on your hands all your life, but you'll have me for a good long time to come. Let's have a canter."

He was pleased enough. If she had wanted to marry Francis Parry he would have resigned her, and felt that it was the right thing. But he didn't want that, or any other marriage for her, yet. He only wanted to be sure that he was not keeping her selfishly; and her words, and more than her words, her tone, relieved him of any doubt on that subject. And her love for Abington, and her wish to make his home for him there suited him. She was more his at Abington than she could be in London.

But he made up his mind that the succession of guests should not fail at Abington. She must not live out of the world, as he and his like estimated the world, at her age. He did not want her to become like the three loud good-natured horsey Pemberton girls, who in spite of their parentage and their wide relationships would always be country cousins, wherever they went. Country cousins who came from such a house as Grays were well enough in their way, but it was not the way of the world that Caroline belonged to, the world that she was so fitted to adorn, and they were not.

They had cantered across a high-lying common, and

descended into a country lane along which they walked their horses, ready for conversation again. The hedges on either side of them were pink and white with May; the golden carpet of early June was spread all over the meadows; the trees wore their dress of freshest green; larks sang in high ecstasy overhead. Grafton felt the delight of the unused untroubled country, but though it was a rest and a refreshment to him, his life was bound up with other things that took him away from it, even while he was enjoying it. Stealing a glance at his girl's much-loved face, he caught something of what it was to her to soak herself in all the happiness of nature, to wake and sleep with it, and to cast off from her the fitful life of sought-out amusements. She had flowered under it. Much as he adored his little Beatrix, and sweet and kind as she was, it came to him that Caroline's was the finer character of the two. Beatrix loved Abington too, and the quieter life they led there; but she loved it as he did, as a change and a refreshment. She would never have been content to settle down to it as Caroline had, for she had not the same resources in herself.

"Do you think there's anything between Beatrix and Dick Mansergh?" he asked suddenly.

She laughed at him. "I've been wondering when you were going to ask me that," she said.

"Oh, then you've noticed it."

"Darling old thing!" she said fondly. "It's plain enough that he's head over ears. You *must* have seen, haven't you?"

"Well, I suppose I have. But I want to know about her. *She* isn't head over ears, is she?"

"No, she certainly isn't that. It's too soon, you know, Daddy."

A shadow always came over his face when that affair with Lassigny was brought to his mind. "She's not still thinking of that fellow, is she?" he asked.

"I expect she thinks of him a good deal. That's why she won't think of anybody else for some time to come."

He did not push his question. He knew that that danger was past, and that if Beatrix still thought of Lassigny it was not with love. That had died in her.

"Poor darling!" he said tenderly. "You know how I hated it at the time. But when she was getting over it I sometimes almost wished that he had come back. I'm precious glad he didn't, though."

"So am I now," said Caroline. "But it did leave a mark upon her. Should you mind, Dad, if she did want to marry Dick?"

"Mind? No. Why should I mind?" he asked. "It's just the sort of marriage I should like for her. I suppose they'd be away a lot at first, but the old man is over eighty. It can't be very long before Dick succeeds. Then they'd be living at Wilborough. There's nothing I should like better."

She was a little surprised at this. It had not been only his objection to the man whom Beatrix had wanted to marry that had so upset him nearly a year before.

He answered the thought in her mind. "I know B

has got to marry," he said. "She's cut out for it. She was so young last year, and it came as a shock to me that she was already of a marriageable age. I couldn't get used to it—that she wasn't mine any more."

"Do you feel like that about it, Dad?"

"I don't now. I've got used to the idea."

"Of course we shall always be yours, whoever we marry."

"Not as you have been, darling. That's impossible. It was old Lady Mansergh who told me that fathers hated their daughters marrying because they had always been first with them, and couldn't be first any longer. That's true, I suppose, if they marry somebody you can't take in. It would certainly have been true of me if Beatrix had married that fellow." He never spoke of Lassigny by name. "But with a man you like and respect it's different. You don't lose everything, even if you can't be first any longer. If he's the right sort of man you gain. I believe your grandfather felt that about me. He loved your mother, and she was very young when we married. He didn't like giving her up, but he was so nice about it that I took particular pains to show him what a lot I thought of him. He was a fine old boy. I wish you'd known him longer, Cara. I believe, when he got used to it, that he was as fond of me as he was of any of his sons. Your mother used to write to him every week, and I used to write to him too. He told me before he died that it had made all the difference to him,

the first year of our marriage. She was his only daughter, you see, and that was the time he felt it most."

"Should you have felt like that about Francis, if I had wanted to marry him, Dad?"

"It would rather have depended on how he felt about me," he said.

"Should you about Dick Mansergh?"

"I think I should. Yes, I think I should. I like him. He's straight. And he's companionable too. Besides, he'd be giving her all she ought to have. That would count for a good deal."

"In what way, Dad?"

"Well, you see, you're responsible for bringing up your daughters in a certain way. You take a pride in what they become. You don't want it all thrown away on somebody who isn't up to their level."

She laughed. "It all sounds very mercenary," she said.

"I don't think it is. A woman's position is her husband's; until she's married it's her father's. You don't want your daughters lessened. It isn't a question of money. It's like to like. Look at that chap your Aunt Prudence married."

"He had lots of money."

"It's all he did have. A silly fellow! Nobody thinks anything of him beside her. She has to carry him on her back wherever she goes."

"Poor Aunt Prudence! It's rather pathetic the way she wants people to like him."

"Women have a wonderful sort of loyalty in that way. She must have found out his deficiencies long ago, but I suppose she wouldn't admit to herself that he has any. It's the people who look on who see it. All of us thought the world of her. She'd have helped on the biggest sort of man. It's all wasted on that rabbit-brained nobody."

"Well, darling, none of us are going to trouble you in that way. I shan't, because I shall certainly want somebody with brains, though I haven't got as many as Aunt Prudence. And I don't think Beatrix will make any marriage that you wouldn't like, now. She's had her lesson, poor darling! She won't let herself be caught again."

"I really should like her to marry Mansergh, if she cared for him."

"She doesn't yet, dear. But I think she's quite likely to come to it. I rather think that he's strong enough to make her."

CHAPTER VIII

THE BISHOP FINDS A MAN

THE Bishop was again visiting at Surley Park. He found his niece's house a restful place of retirement, and his wife had confided to Ella Carruthers that it was such a relief to the dear man to get away from the clergy sometimes.

He was not, however, to be spared the question of the clergy upon this visit, for the Graftons were coming over to consult him about one for Abington, and he had been given due warning that it would be so. A private patron does not always consult his Bishop over his appointments, and it was supposed that his Lordship would not be averse from giving his advice in this instance.

Grafton came over to tea, with Caroline and Beatrix. There were to be guests at the Abbey that evening, or the consultation would have taken place over the dinner table.

Tea was in the garden, which spread in wide cedar-decked lawns round the great white house. The Bishop had a lovely garden of his own, in which he could taste the sweets of retirement. But there was a remoteness about this spreading country garden, with the fields and woods all around it, which he could not get in the high-walled pleasaunce of his palace. He sighed

with contentment as he sank down into a large cane chair by the tea table, and said:

"You have a lovely place here, my dear. I sometimes wish that I had set out to be a country gentleman, and dealt with beasts instead of with men."

"You have to deal with both as a landowner," said Ella, "and the men are sometimes more difficult than the beasts."

"The men *are* beasts sometimes," said the Bishop's wife, who prided herself upon her plain speaking.

"Now, my dear," he said, "we are going to forget all the disputes that beset us as long as we are here, and believe that none of them ever come to disturb the peace of such a place as Surley. Isn't your friend Grafton coming over to see me, Ella? Ah! but here he is with two of those nice girls. What pretty creatures they are! It's a pleasure to look at them."

The Graftons were coming across the wide lawn. They were indeed pleasant-looking objects of the countryside, Grafton in his smart-looking blue flannel suit, the girls in their pretty summer frocks. Presently they were all chatting and laughing over the tea table, and the Bishop was liking them more than ever for the friendly way in which they treated him, and the absence from their demeanour of that paralysing awe which so often irked him on similar occasions.

Tea was over, and Grafton had just introduced the subject about which he had come, when a tall clerical figure was seen advancing across the lawn.

"There's my friend Leadbetter come to see me," said the Bishop. "Do you mind talking over the question before him? He has been in the Diocese much longer than I have, and might be able to help us."

"I don't mind a bit," said Grafton, "but I don't know Mr. Leadbetter yet. I haven't had time to call on him."

The introductions were made. Mr. Leadbetter seemed rather vague as to who the Graftons were; but he seemed to be rather vague about everything except the absorbing subject of Church music. He was a tall thin man, with a pair of short-sighted eyes that peered mildly through big spectacles. His new parishioners had not quite made up their minds what to make of him yet, but those who had had anything to do with him had found him thoughtful and friendly, and were inclined to accept him as an adequate substitute for the old Rector who had lived among them for so long, and whose ways they had known so well.

"We were just beginning to talk about a new Vicar for Abington," said the Bishop, when Mr. Leadbetter had settled in a chair and had accepted a cigarette, which he afterwards surreptitiously got rid of when it had gone out three times, and both ends were in a shockingly untidy state.

"Ah, yes, Abington," he said, "I called at Abington Vicarage the other day. I remember that the note of the doorscraper was C sharp. Mercer is going, he

told me. A very agreeable man—Mercer. You will be sorry to lose him, Mr. Grafton.”

Beatrix caught the Bishop's eye. There was a twinkle in it which made her want to kiss him. She refrained from this exhibition, but felt she had found a true friend.

“I know who you are, now, of course,” said Mr. Leadbetter. “I remember that Mercer mentioned your name when he came over to ask me if I thought there was any chance of his being preferred to this living.”

There was a short pause, and then everybody, including the Bishop, laughed. Mr. Leadbetter looked surprised for a moment, and then smiled deprecatingly. “Now I remember,” he said, “perhaps you won't be sorry to lose him, after all.”

This was all that was said about the retiring Vicar of Abington.

“I haven't many friends among the clergy,” said Grafton. “One or two of my friends at Cambridge went into the Church, but I have lost track of them mostly, and I can't think of one who would be likely to want to come here. There is not much to offer, though I should be prepared to add to the stipend for a man who couldn't afford to take it as it is.”

He told them to what figure he would be willing to raise it, and the Bishop said that it would give a wider field of choice, as they need not think only about men who had money of their own.

“What sort of a man would you like to have there?”

he asked. "Don't tell any one that I asked that question, Leadbetter."

"Certainly not," said the Rector of Surley. "I never make trouble for my Diocesan."

Grafton did not quite see why the question should not have been asked. "All questions of High and Low, and that sort of thing, I leave to you," he said. "The sort of man I should like to have would be one who would get on well with his parishioners, and help to keep us all together."

"Is that the sort of man you want, my dear?" asked the Bishop, turning his beneficent gaze upon Caroline. "I suppose you take an interest in the people around you."

"What you really want is a Christian," said the Bishop's wife uncompromisingly. "I suppose there are a few in the Diocese, though I can't say I have met many of them."

"My dear, my dear!" expostulated the Bishop.

Caroline answered his question. "We haven't been here very long," she said, "but we have made a great many friends among our people. We should like to do a lot for them, and we would help anybody who came there to look after them."

"That is a most laudable statement from a Squire's daughter," said the Bishop. "What sort of things do you want to do for your people?"

"She has all sorts of plans," said Ella. "We have talked them over together. I want to do something of the same sort here when I get to know Mr.

Leadbetter more." She threw a look at the mild gentleman, who was just then meditating the final relinquishment of his cigarette. "But there are more people at Abington than there are at Surley."

"Do you mean blankets and coal?" asked the Bishop's wife, "or do you mean Chamber music and lectures on literature?"

Mr. Leadbetter raised himself in his chair. "Ah! Chamber music!" he said, with a gleam of satisfaction behind his spectacles. "If only we could manage some Chamber music!"

"Not a bit of use," said the Bishop's wife. "A nigger minstrel entertainment would go down much better."

"Caroline wants to teach the children Morris dancing and all that sort of thing," said Grafton. "They have it in the village where my brother-in-law lives, and everybody enjoys it immensely."

Caroline leaned forward. "Anything which will make us all happy together," she said. "There are a lot of things which can be done that we should all like doing, and that would go of themselves if they were once started."

Grafton looked at her fondly. "I believe they would all do anything for her, already," he said, "but she doesn't want them to feel that she is patronising them. She wants to play with them just as she has played with her friends in London. That's it, isn't it, Cara?"

"Yes, it's to make us friends," she said.

"I think that healthy amusement is a very good thing for people in a country parish," said the Bishop's wife, "but you must have somebody to lead. Is that what you want your new Vicar to do? If so I should think he would be quite willing to do it. I have never found the clergy unwilling to lead in anything."

"I should say the same about the wives of the clergy," said the Bishop, with another twinkle in his eye, "I think we must find a married Vicar for Abington."

"You didn't find a married Rector for Surley," said his niece, with another provocative look at Mr. Leadbetter, who met it with bland unconsciousness.

"Music is a great thing to bring people together," he said, "and I suppose dancing too. But I have never danced, myself."

The eyes of Beatrix and the Bishop met again, and this time she had great difficulty in preventing herself from embracing him.

"That will only be a part of what we should want to do," Caroline said; "but it would be rather important to have the clergyman on our side. If you want to get people together, he is the best man to do it, and he ought to know them better than anybody."

"Yes, he *ought* to," said the Bishop's wife.

"He does, if he is the right sort of man," said the Bishop. "I think any incumbent might think himself fortunate in having you to help him in his work, my dear."

Caroline's face fell a little, and the Bishop noticed it. Afterwards he asked his niece why it was.

She thought for a moment, and then looked up with a smile. "To tell you the truth, Uncle," she said, "and to risk your displeasure, Caroline and I are rather fed up with the talk of a clergyman's *work*. I won't say anything about this place, but at Abington it seemed to mean nothing but interference, and trying to bring people into line all round. Caroline refused to go visiting, as she was asked to do. Of course she does go to see people, just as much perhaps as if she set out to do it as a regular duty, in the way that the Coopers did here, and never ceased talking about and patting themselves on the back for it. But she likes to go where they know she comes as a friend, and will be pleased to see her. She hates to think of that sort of thing as work."

"I don't know why you should think you risk my displeasure in telling me that, my dear," said the Bishop.

A week later the Graftons were invited to dine at the Bishop's Palace. The invitation was sent to Caroline by the Bishop's wife, who indicated in a few terse sentences that a clergyman would be there on inspection, but didn't know it, and was not to know it. If he didn't suit he could go back where he came from, and nobody would be any the worse. Probably her way of putting it had not been authorised by the Bishop, who, however, took Grafton into his library

on their arrival, and told him that he thought he had found him the right man.

“He is quite young,” he said, “and has not long been married. He has been working hard in a very poor part of London, and I fancy that his health won’t stand it much longer. His father was an old friend of mine, and if you like him I think I can persuade him to come to you. He hasn’t any money of his own, but what you mentioned the other day will be enough for him. His name is Gerald Prescott.”

They went up to the drawing-room, where a little group was standing by one of the windows, admiring the view of the garden, with the piled masonry of the Cathedral rising above the trees which enclosed it. There were four of them. Ella Carruthers and her aunt were talking together apart. The first impression of the group was one of happy youth. They were all talking and laughing together, as if none of them had a care in the world. They were Caroline, the Bishop’s chaplain whom she knew already, and Prescott and his wife, with both of whom she had established relations almost upon the first words of introduction.

Grafton’s first impression of the man to whom he had been invited to extend his patronage was of one hardly more than a boy. He was very fair, with untidy hair crowning a smooth fresh face, and though his smile was frequent and pleased there was rather a pathetic look as of a tired child about his eyes. His wife looked older than he, though she was actually

a few years younger, and not marked by the physical weariness that showed in him. She had rosy cheeks and dark alert eyes, in which there was a motherly look very noticeable when she turned them upon her husband.

Caroline was immensely taken with both of them, they were so simple and so confiding, and so unlike any young couple she had ever met before. Both of them belonged to her world; that was evident by a score of little signs. But they seemed to be quite detached from it, and indeed to have lost interest in it. Their interests were based upon a broad humanity which took no count of social grades. If the Bishop had bethought himself of his niece's protest against the perpetual talk of a clergyman's 'work,' in producing this particular clergyman for inspection, he was abundantly justified by Prescott's conversation. He and his wife both talked of the life they were living, the people they knew, and the things they did, in the same way as they might have talked if he had been an artist, for instance, living in Chelsea. There was the big church in the background, which would correspond to the studio, and what went on there, not to be too much talked about; and all around it the atmosphere of struggle, and tears, and laughter, and the miraculous events that shake the lives of those whose existence is based upon no material certainties, but based all the firmer upon an immoveable trust in a providence that may at any time bring something exciting and beneficial to pass, and at the worst will never let you

quite down. The richness of it all was amazing. Instead of the picture of mean streets and drab and sordid lives, into which a man descended from serener heights to fight with poverty and crime, there was a crowded stage of characters of infinite variety, playing with the big things of life which are hidden under a mass of little things in the secured places, but playing with them as the gods might play with them, who must have the biggest toys to amuse them.

"You seem to have a lot of most disreputable acquaintances," said the Bishop's wife, when Prescott had been telling them stories about his friends.

"Oh, yes, we have," he said, with a bright smile. "All the respectable ones go to chapel. But they're so dull that we don't try to get them away. There's no proselytising in our parish."

Caroline began to be afraid, as the life and the pursuits of these young people disclosed themselves, that Abington, with its sparser, more monotonous life, would scarcely attract them, or satisfy them if they came there. But Prescott, who was sitting next to her at dinner, said to her in a low voice: "How do you think she's looking? She's always lived in the country; she's apt to get a little run down in a town."

Caroline reassured him, after a glance at his wife, who looked the picture of health and vigour, and he seemed relieved. "Of course she loves it all," he said. "But it keeps her so on the go. It's very distracting, a town life. Both of us enjoy getting out

into the country sometimes. You seem to belong to yourself more."

It was exactly what she had said of herself, finding a town life of such different quality from his distracting for self-possession. "Would you live in the country if you had the choice?" she hazarded.

"I'd live anywhere with her," he said, jerking his head towards his wife with a boyish gesture. "But if I had to choose between the two, for myself, I'd choose a town, because there's more to do. We both of us like to have plenty to do."

After dinner, before the men came up, Caroline sat with Viola Prescott in the window-seat from which they could see the dark mass of the Cathedral rising above the trees into the velvet purple night, and she asked the same question, in a tone that gave Caroline a tightening of the throat.

"He's enjoying every moment of this," she said, "and he wanted just such a change. We haven't been away together since just after Christmas. Do you think he looks *very* tired? It has been so hot in London."

"I think he looks as if he wants a change," said Caroline. "Fresh air, perhaps, and not quite so much to do."

She sighed. "I was afraid you would say that," she said. "The Bishop said it too. He's a lovely sort of Bishop, isn't he? So human, and so kind, and not too churchy. It would be rather peaceful to be in his Diocese."

"Would you like to live in the country?" Caroline asked her.

"I should love it. I always did live in the country before we were married. I used to go and stay with an aunt in London sometimes, and was always glad to get back. I don't care about London amusements. But we don't have to bother ourselves with them in our part of London. I do like that, better than I thought I should, because you see people in a more natural way than at the other end of London. Gerry feels like that too. I can hardly ever drag him up to see our relations, and they hardly ever come to see us."

"I feel just the same, about our part of London," said Caroline. "I've persuaded father to give up our house there, because I like living in the country much better. It's partly because of the people, as you say. You get to know all sorts better, in the country. I have a lot of friends among the people in our village, just as you have in your parish, though they live rather quieter lives than yours seem to, and are not so—well, so disreputable."

Both of them laughed, with a glance at the Bishop's wife. "They're not really disreputable," Viola said; "only most of them don't know whether they are going to have anything to eat to-morrow, or the next day. So they have to keep cheerful while they *have* got enough. Still, it *is* rather a rackety life. I think I should like to be among quieter people, for a change; and of course one does miss the sweet air and the peace of the country. I wouldn't mind a bit for myself if I

didn't think Gerry ought to have a rest. He isn't very strong, poor darling, and he works too hard."

It was the first time that work had been mentioned.

"And he *will* invite such a lot of people to meals," she went on; "and there isn't always enough for them. And then of course *he* goes without."

"I expect you do too, if there isn't enough," said Caroline, smiling at her.

"Oh, I'm as strong as a horse," she said. "But we haven't got much money, you know, and house-keeping *is* rather difficult sometimes."

The Bishop's wife sailed over to them. "Are you persuading her to make her husband come to Abington?" she asked. "She *ought* to. He can't stand *that* life much longer."

Caroline looked up at her in some confusion.

"Oh, I know nothing was to be said about it till after you had seen whether you liked them or not," she said. "But of course you like them. I do myself, though I should like to smack them both and send them to bed."

"We want a Vicar at Abington," said Caroline. "Father is the patron of the living. Do persuade your husband to come there."

Viola's eyes filled with tears, and she took Caroline's hand. "Oh, my dear, it's just what I should love for him," she said. "He'll get enough to eat, and time to rest sometimes."

So when the men came up they found it all settled for them.

CHAPTER IX

THE NEW VICAR

THE Prescotts came over to the Abbey on the next afternoon. They were to stay there for two nights, and everything was to be settled for Prescott's induction to the living at an early date.

Both of them were in the highest spirits. "What a lark it all is!" said the Vicar-elect of Abington, grinning all over his face as Caroline met them at the door. His wife was as excited and happy as he was, but when Caroline took her up to her room, she took hold of both her hands, and the tears came into her eyes, as she said: "Oh, my dear, if you only knew what all this means to us! This lovely, peaceful country, after the crowds and the dirt! It's the dirt I hate so much. You can't get away from that. Gerry hates it too, though he won't admit it."

Grafton had arranged that they should inspect the Vicarage immediately upon their arrival. The Vicar had expressed some surprise at the suddenness with which everything had been arranged. He let it be understood that it would have been more in keeping with the respect due to his holy office if he had been consulted about the new appointment. But at this time he was more careful than usual to escape all sus-

picion of dispute, having his eye fixed upon the illuminated address and the silver, or at least heavily-plated, salver or tea-service of the presentation, of which, however, he had as yet gained no hint, although the time for his departure was getting close.

The four of them walked up to the Vicarage together, after a preliminary inspection of the church, with which Prescott expressed himself delighted.

“Ours is a horrid gloomy thing,” he said, “and you can’t always feel you are getting quite away in it. This is just right. I like it’s being here, right away from the village.”

Their progress up the village street aroused notice, for it was some weeks since it had been known that the Vicar was giving up, and so far there had been no sign of his successor. If this was to be the new Vicar, it was generally agreed by those who saw him, on his way to and from the Vicarage, that he would do very well. The children were coming from school when they returned, and he and Caroline, who were walking behind the others, found themselves involved in a laughing group of them, and went down to the end of the street with a small boy holding one of Prescott’s hands and a small girl the other, while the rest circled round them and gave shrill and hilarious answers to the absurd questions asked of them by this remarkable but none the less entertaining new kind of clergyman.

The Vicar and Mrs. Mercer received them according as their different temperaments dictated. The

Vicar was important and patronising with Prescott, and his wife sympathetic with Viola.

"I'm sure you will like the house," she said. "We have had some very happy times here, and are sorry to be giving it up, although we have a very nice one to go to. We will do all we can to make it easy for you to come in."

Caroline put her arm into hers. She felt very sorry for this poor little lady, who had made such a brave show in a situation that to her must have been full of distress. Caroline did not know that her father had actually asked the Vicar to leave, but it had been made so plain all around that there was nothing but satisfaction felt at his departure. People liked Mrs. Mercer, whenever they had a chance of judging of her apart from her husband, but she had suffered from her very loyalty to him, and must have been saddened at leaving her home of many years with few to regret her.

She responded to Caroline's touch with a little pressure of her arm, and smiled up at her. "It's horrid going away from you, dear," she said. "I shall be quite jealous thinking of Mrs. Prescott in my place here."

They went over the house and garden and outbuildings together, the Vicar talking most of the time, and Prescott's face gradually lengthening as he did so. For his talk was mostly of 'fixtures' and of 'taking over,' and apparently it had not hitherto struck the Vicar-elect that to be presented to a living involved

details of this sort. He did not, however, say anything as to any difficulty he might find in providing money that had mounted up to a considerable sum when the Vicar had indicated all the expensive articles that he had put in, and all the other expensive articles that it wouldn't be worth while to take out. He looked a little less frightened when they had come back to the drawing-room and his wife said boldly: "I don't think we shall want anything that we're not obliged to take, Mr. Mercer. We shan't be able to live in more than a few rooms for some time, because we haven't got any money for furnishing."

The Vicar blinked. It seemed almost indecent to acknowledge a lack of money in this fashion, especially to a man who had 'private means.' He turned to Prescott. "I don't think you will find it practicable to live in a few rooms here," he said. "Your parishioners expect more of you in the country than they do in a town. You have to keep up your position before them."

Viola's interposition had lifted a weight from her husband's mind. Of course she would undertake all that sort of thing. It wasn't for him to bother himself about it. They would be quite happy living in two rooms together, with the furniture that they already had; and, with the enormous income of £500 a year that would now be at their disposal, they would be able to get whatever they wanted to furnish the rest. Nor was he at all subdued by the Vicar's speech.

"Oh, we are not going to be bothered about keeping

up a position," he said. "I expect I shall have plenty of parishioners a good deal poorer than I am."

With the casting off of the burden which had begun to oppress him, he emerged into a condition of extremely high spirits again. He drew comparisons between the state in which he would live and that in which the Mercers had lived. He chaffed the Vicar, and treated him generally as if he were rather a comic character. He showed himself extremely irresponsible with regard to all questions of management, both domestic and official, and told Mrs. Mercer that if she hadn't taken all that sort of thing off her husband's hands it must have been because she was not fit to be a clergyman's wife. He received in a spirit of levity a list of fixtures which the Vicar had typed out for him, services in the church, meetings for this and that in the schoolroom and elsewhere, an itinerary of visiting for three afternoons in the week.

"You *have* been a busy little bee," he said. "I expect you've kept them all in order too. I'm afraid I shan't be able to do that. But it all looks splendid on paper. I wish I could afford a typewriter. But what's this word 'agout'? Oh, I see, it's meant for 'about.' Thanks very much. I'll put it in my pocket."

When they had taken themselves off the Vicar went into his study, with his mouth set and the cloud on his Olympian brow that his wife had become so used to after interviews of this sort. She followed him in,

however, and sat herself down in the high chair by the fireplace to go through with it.

"Upon my word!" he began. "It's a positive *insult* for Grafton to put a man like that in to succeed me. And unless I am very much mistaken, it's meant as such."

"The Bishop chose him, you know, Albert," she said quietly. "Mr. Grafton told us that he had asked him to recommend him somebody."

"The Bishop can't know what an impossible sort of creature he is," he said. "I am not at all sure that it isn't my duty to tell him. In all my life I've never seen anybody so absolutely unfitted to take charge of a parish. The idea of his having the audacity to tell me that he didn't believe in regimenting people. That was a hit at me and my work, of course. All that I have done here for years past is to be thrown away, and the parish turned into a bear garden, for a young idiot like that to disport himself in."

"He is evidently very gay and lively by nature," she said, "and of course he is pleased at coming here. I think that half of what he said was only meant in fun, and evidently he relies a great deal upon her for all the business side of his work."

"She is no better than he is," snapped the Vicar. "Fancy a woman like that going about among the people, and them knowing the way in which they are going to live here. If she *does* go about among the people! But I should think it's more likely that they will both spend most of their time at the Abbey,

sponging on the Graftons, and trying to get in with all the big houses around. You can see they are nobodies—not a shilling to bless themselves with. No doubt it is a great thing for them to get into a neighbourhood like this, and they'll make the most of it."

He went on for some time in this fashion, but his wife did not answer him, and when he had run himself down a little and looked at her, he saw that she was softly crying.

He came to a stop in front of her and said awkwardly, "What's the matter? It's dreadful to think of things going to rack and ruin in a place where we've worked so hard and done so much; but *we* shall be out of it at any rate. Don't upset yourself, Gertrude."

She dried her eyes. "I was thinking how happy they both were," she said. "We were pleased too when we first came here and looked forward to living in this nice house."

He resumed his pacing of the room. "So we shall be where we are going," he said, "and we are looking forward to a life of useful active service, and not to the ramshackle unuseful life that those two are going to live."

"They have left a great many friends behind them where they have been living," she said, "and they will make a great many friends here. We shall leave hardly a single friend, after fifteen years, and if we make new ones where we are going to, I'm afraid we shan't keep

them. Oh, why can't you think more kindly of people, Albert? We see everybody around us making friends and helping each other, and we are left out of it all. The people we have quarrelled with can't all of them always be in the wrong, and we always in the right."

"Oh, come now, my dear," he said authoritatively. "We have had that all out, and I have admitted to you that I have perhaps been a little too rigid in exacting respect for my office. The fact is, Gertrude, that you are upset at giving up your home of so many years, and I can make excuses for that. Let us begin our new life with cheerful hearts, and leave the past behind us."

"We shall take it all with us," she said, "if you can't learn the Christian charity that you preach about. My heart went out to those two young people. I know that they are good and loving; you can see it in their faces—loving towards each other and full of love towards the people they live amongst. I am sure they will do more with that spirit than we have ever been able to do."

"I can make excuses for you, Gertrude, as I said just now, but in accusing me to my face of a lack of Christian charity, you are saying a very serious thing."

"I know," she said. "And lately I have begun to see that it is a very serious thing. You can't see goodness where it is plain to be seen. I don't believe you will find anywhere a sweeter, truer character than Caroline Grafton's. There isn't a soul in the place

who knows her who doesn't almost worship her; but she has offended you in some little way and you can never say a good word for her. And I think the happiness of that young couple ought to make anybody feel better who sees it, but it only makes you gird at them. It has been so often like that. How many times have you come back into this room after seeing people off with a smile on your face, to cover them with contempt and anger? I know we shall never be happy wherever we go, if you can't see how wrong you are; and we shall never have any friends—not to keep them. We shall be lonely all our lives."

She saved him the trouble of replying to this unwonted attack by going out of the room, once more in tears. He walked up and down for some time after she had left, with a frown upon his face, and once he went to the door, and hesitated, as if he would follow her. But he thought better—or worse—of it, and came back into the room and sat himself down at his writing-table after the manner of a man exasperated beyond all bearing.

It was not his wife, however, who had exasperated him, for he was nice to her when they met again later on, and talked pleasantly about the new home they were going to; so that she began to think that she had been rather hard on him.

Caroline found her father alone just before they went up to dress for dinner, and said: "Dad, darling, you've got heaps of money. Couldn't you buy all those things Lord Salisbury wants to leave behind, and make

them a present of them? Poor dears, they'll have hardly anything. They have been laughing about it, and I don't think he minds. But of course she would like to have a pretty house. She was brought up in one. She has been telling me about it."

"He's been telling *me* about it too," said Grafton laughing. "You know, I'm not at all certain, Cara, that we shan't have trouble with that pair of lunatics. Nobody can help liking them, but as a Vicar and Vicaress of a respectable country parish I don't quite see them."

"Oh, I do," she said. "He is just one big loving heart, and he hasn't time to think about all the little things that most of us make such a fuss about. And she has thrown herself into it all because she loves him. But she's just like anybody else, and she'll keep him in order."

"Do you know the story of their marriage?" he asked her.

"She told me that the fathers of both of them had lost all their money before they died, and that their relations on both sides had been very much against their marriage."

"Their fathers were partners in business, and a third partner let them in horribly, and bolted. Before they had time to pull things together both of them died, within a month of one another. Their mothers were both dead too, and they are both only children. It's an extraordinary series of coincidences. The relations on each side accused the other of rank

carelessness, and there must have been great carelessness somewhere, though they haven't discovered yet where it was. I dare say they were both happy-go-lucky gentlemen, if they were anything like their offspring, and one was as bad as the other. So both those young people being in the same box they thought the best thing they could do would be to get married."

"She was in a furniture shop for a year after her father died."

"Yes; till he'd managed to save twenty pounds out of his screw to get something to start on. An old aunt of his came round by that time, but he wouldn't take a bob off her. Well, I dare say they've been as happy as most people on his hundred and fifty a year."

"Isn't it wonderful? But they'll be much better off now. You will buy those things for them, won't you, darling?"

"No, Cara, I won't."

"Dad, darling! Why not?"

"I've told you, haven't I?"

She thought for a moment, and then kissed him. "Yes, I see," she said. "You're a clear-sighted old Daddy. I expect you've been itching to do it all the time."

"Well, I have, to tell you the truth," he said. "I should have liked to tell Mercer to make up his beastly bill and send it in to me. But I saw it wouldn't do. They wouldn't like to be dependent on us, and they wouldn't like to say no. I'll tell you what I've had to do, though, and it's a good thing that I've had a lucky

stroke lately that will cover it. I've had to promise the Bishop to endow the blooming living up to the tune I was ready to pay Prescott. He wouldn't have taken it otherwise."

In her happy state of never having had occasion to consider money, she did not realise the magnitude of this obligation. "You're a little patron of the Church, darling," she said, "and they'll put you in all the papers."

"That's what I'm afraid of," he said. "I've told the old boy to keep it dark."

The Graftons happened to be in London for the week in which the Vicar took his departure. He had found out that there was no proposal on foot to present him with a testimonial, nor even to give him a farewell tea. He suffered acute annoyance over these omissions, but almost for the first time in his life kept it to himself, and pleased his wife by proposing that they should give a farewell tea themselves, to the more regular of the churchgoing parishioners. This spontaneous exhibition of liberality, coupled with the absence of any serious outbreak of censorious speech during their last weeks at Abington, led her to suppose that he also had taken to heart what had become so plain to her, and gave hope of a less stormy life in the future. But, although there may have been some faint reason for this hope, the tea-party had suggested itself as the only opportunity for delivering a speech that he had been preparing for some weeks past. If there was nobody who had the common

decency, at the end of fifteen years' pastorate, to sum up the work that had been done in it, and to congratulate him upon it, he would do so himself. He had kept records of all services, classes, meetings, visits, and journeys during the whole of the time, and put together they amounted to quite a respectable total. They would see that the life of a devoted parish priest even in a country parish was not the easy thing that 'perhaps some of you here are inclined to think.' When he had added up his totals the bright idea struck him of dividing his income into them, and showing what an absurd rate of pay the devoted parish priest received for his self-sacrificing labours. But when the sum had been done he found it worked out at about six-and sixpence an item, and he couldn't honestly make it less, even by omitting to reckon in the rentable value of the Vicarage. Counting that in, it came to about half-a-guinea, and however cheap his sermons might be at that price, he thought it would hardly do to give the idea that he had been paid ten and fivepence every time he had done one of his parishioners the honour of paying him or her a call. So he gave up the idea with some regret, because, of course, you couldn't really look at it in that way, and the figures were sufficiently startling if looked at in some other.

Eventually the idea of the tea-party was given up too. Regular churchgoers were found to be few in number, when the question came to be considered in detail, and of no great importance in the community.

The farmers were hay-making, and without a stiffening of substantial people the affair would come down to a mere offering of a meal to a score or so of people who would rather enjoy it, which scarcely seemed worth while.

So the Vicar cast the dust of Abington from off his feet with no formal leave-taking at all, and, remembering the thirteen thousand odd engagements which he had carried out, felt some of the satisfaction of martyrdom as he stepped into the train.

The Prescotts moved in. They refused to stay at the Abbey more than a single night, and would not have stayed one if their furniture had arrived on the same day as they did. For they would not have missed the fun of a move for anything.

It was not much of a move. The contents of their two rooms in Bermondsey made more of a show than might have been expected. Viola had a pretty taste in furniture and decoration, and the year she had spent before her marriage in helping to furnish for other people had shown her the right way to set about it. They had managed to scrape together a little money and made it go a very long way. Moreover, everybody helped her. Caroline and she made curtains. Odd things not wanted at the Abbey found their way to the Vicarage and were accepted as the gifts of friends. Mr. Williams came over from Felt-ham and carpentered gaily. Maurice Bradby was the handy man about the place. Everybody who came to see these new, funny, delightful people got caught

up in the prevailing excitement and did something, if it was only to advise somebody else.

Only the new Vicar did nothing towards the installation of his home, except appreciate it enormously. He was out all day among his parishioners, whom he found the nicest sort of people he had ever met.

CHAPTER X

YOUNG GEORGE TAKES ADVICE

ON a day early in his summer holidays Young George went over to Feltham Hall to lunch with his friend and schoolfellow, Jimmy Beckley. Mr. and Mrs. Beckley and their eldest daughter were away. "You don't mind putting up with the kids at lunch," said Jimmy. "We can shift them afterwards or make them useful if we want to play games. Ruth and Jane aren't bad at tennis, and I've trained them all to bowl to me at a net. We can have a little cricket practise if you like."

Jimmy himself had reached the ripe age of fifteen. He was the only son of his house. The kids to whom he referred were his sisters Ruth, Jane, Isabel, and Ellen, who ranged in age from sixteen to eleven, and whom he affected to rule with a rod of iron. They were rather subdued in manner, but more, perhaps, because their father, who had married late in life, was something of a martinet, and they spent their days in company with an accomplished and decisive French governess, than because they were in any particular dread of Jimmy's rod.

"Mademoiselle will want to jabber French at you," Jimmy warned his friend. "They're supposed to do it at lunch, and I don't mind it myself, because it's

good training. But you can answer her in English if you like. She understands all right. She's not a bad sort, though apt to think she has some authority over me, which of course she hasn't. You'll make allowances for that. She's been here five years, and of course I was only a kid when she came."

"Oh, I'll make allowances all right," said Young George. "If she corrects your table manners, I'll pretend I don't understand."

Jimmy passed this by, as being beneath his dignity to reply to. "Lunch won't be for another half-hour," he said. "We might go and have a look at the gees. The governor bought a new pair of carriage horses the other day which I should like you to throw your eye over."

"Which one?" asked Young George. "I can throw better with the right."

"Funny ass!" said Jimmy. "I think the governor depends too much on the judgment of Kirby, the head coachman. He's a shooting man himself, and doesn't take the interest in his cattle that you or I would."

"I like cattle myself," said Young George; "especially good milkers."

Jimmy thought it was time to rebuke this spirit of levity. "You seem rather above yourself this morning, George," he said. "I suppose you're bucked with the idea of seeing Maggie Williams. You'll be glad to hear that I told Ruth to ask her to tea. I've no fancy for infants myself, but I'm aware some people like 'em."

Young George blushed, but did not allow himself to be confounded. "Have you seen Kate Pemberton since you've been home?" he asked.

"When you're ready to talk sensibly, I may perhaps tell you something about Kate Pemberton," said Jimmy. "As long as you're in this rotting mood, I prefer to keep it to myself."

"I wouldn't rot upon such a serious subject as love's young dream," said Young George. "You ought to know me better than that, Jimmy."

They had by this time reached the stables. It seemed to Young George that Jimmy showed some relief at being told that the head coachman was at his dinner. He told one of the grooms to strip the horses they had particularly come to inspect, and entered into a long and technical discussion with him as to their points and qualifications. Young George listened, not without admiration. He couldn't have done it so well himself, and his tendency to 'rot' was subdued by the time the inspection was over and they had left the stables on the way towards the house.

"I say," he said, "what was it you wanted to tell me about Kate Pemberton?"

Jimmy did not reply directly. "You know, old chap, I'm not so sure that you're not right in preferring a youngster like Maggie Williams," he said. "Girls of that age haven't got our knowledge of the world, of course. But they're devilish taking sometimes. And they look up to you more than an older woman does."

"I like Maggie all right," said Young George, with elaborate unconcern. "She's very lively and amusing; but I've never said I was gone on her, as you've said you were on Kate Pemberton."

"No, you haven't *said* it," said Jimmy significantly. "However, I don't want to press for confidences you don't care about giving me. About Kate Pemberton—I must confess I have thought a good deal about her for the last two years—at least in the hunting season I have; it calmed down a bit last summer. Nobody could help admiring her on a horse."

"She goes like a good 'un," said Young George. "I suppose you mean you're calming down a bit now. Have you seen her since you've been home?"

"Yes, I rode over to Grays yesterday afternoon. That's what I wanted to tell you about. There was a fellow there called Colonel Webster; I think he's a Gunner. Unless I'm very much mistaken he's there for one purpose and one purpose only."

Young George was impressed. "Did she seem to like him?" he asked.

"She couldn't be expected to show that before me," said Jimmy. "I must say she was as nice as ever. She knows how to treat a fellow a bit younger than herself. There's none of that 'Oh, you're only a little boy' sort of business that some people seem to think so funny."

"If you mean Barbara," said Young George, "it's only her fun. She does the same sort of thing to me, and I don't mind it."

"I wasn't thinking of Barbara," said Jimmy, "I know it's only rotting with her, and we rot her in return. When is Barbara coming back, by the bye?"

"Monday, I think. Well, go on—about the Colonel who has cut you out."

"That's just the whole point, my son," said Jimmy. "I'm not going to let him cut me out."

"What are you going to do then—challenge him with pistols?"

"No, I'm going to retire. To tell you the honest, I'm not sure I haven't made rather an ass of myself over Kate."

"Oh, don't say that, Jimmy."

"How old should you say she was, now?"

"I don't know. I should think about thirty."

"Oh, give her a chance, old man. I happen to know she's twenty-six. Well, you see it's all right now. I reckon that fellows of our age, who have knocked about a bit and know what's what, are equal to girls of ten years or so older. In fact, Kate has always treated me as an equal, as I told you, and in a good many things she's deferred to my opinion. At the same time, you've got to look ahead a bit. You know yourself that a *man* of twenty-six is still young. I shall be all right in ten years' time, but I ask myself what *she*'ll be—eh?"

"A bit long in the tooth," suggested Young George.

"Well, there you are," said Jimmy. "I shall always have a friendly feeling for Kate. After all, she was the first girl I *really* cared about. Others before

her were just fancies that I grew out of. I think she'll always remember me too. We've had some good times together. But I think it's time it ended now. I shall make a few enquiries about this fellow Webster, and if I find that he's a decent chap, and means to run straight, as I've no reason to suppose he doesn't, I shall stand aside."

"Well, I think it's very noble of you," said Young George. "I say, what's the French for 'How do you do?'"

Mademoiselle was standing at the hall door, and somewhat ruffled Jimmy's dignity by enquiring in voluble French whether he hadn't heard the gong five minutes ago and whether he had already washed his hands for lunch. She smiled affably at Young George, however, as she shook hands with him, and said that evidently in the vacations one must not be too exigent as to punctuality.

"Commencez donc, Mam'selle," said Jimmy. "Nous allons laver les mains, moi et Monsieur Grafton. Nous descendons toute de suite."

"I say, you *can* chuck it off!" said Young George admiringly, as they went upstairs; and Jimmy felt his self-respect restored. "I've picked it up going abroad," he said. "You've got to be pretty good at it for Diplomacy, you know. May as well get used to it early."

"I thought you'd chucked the idea of Diplomacy."

"Ah, that's when I thought I should want to make money—you know."

"Oh, I see. You were going to chuck Oxford too."

"I shall go to Oxford. The governor was there. Pity to break the tradition. And you may as well have a good time while you're young. I shan't settle down for some years now. I'm glad I've made a clean breast of it all to you, George. It gives one a good deal to think about, but I feel I've done the right thing."

"I'm sure you have," said Young George sympathetically. "You don't want to tie yourself up at your age."

The four Beckley girls, flaxen-haired and pig-tailed, and Mademoiselle, were already at table, and Young George went round and shook hands with the girls before taking his seat. He privately thought them a very dull lot, being used to the gay talkativeness of his own sisters, which was a great contrast to their don't-speak-till-you're-spoken-to manner, but he did not allow his opinion to be apparent; and he was excessively liked in the Beckley family, the younger members of which, always excepting the son of the house, were not accustomed to so much notice as Young George gave them. Mademoiselle liked him also, and had said of him that his manners were as good as those of a young Frenchman. If the Beckley girls had not thought that they were a good deal better this well-meant commendation would have reduced him in their eyes; for they hated all things French with a deadly hatred.

Mademoiselle, out of compliment to Young George, permitted English to be spoken during the meal. It

was only Jimmy who forgot the permission occasionally, his sisters being rejoiced to be freed from the shackles of the detested tongue, and taking a more lively part in the conversation in consequence. Young George found Ruth, next to whom he sat, more sympathetic than he had been aware of. She had a great admiration for Barbara, whose freedom of speech and action she secretly envied, and Young George, who was proud of all his sisters, told several anecdotes of Barbara's ready wit, which were well received.

"Qu'elle est mignonne, cette petite, n'est ce pas, Mam'selle?" said Jimmy, after a story which had been greeted with approving laughter.

"If she heard you calling her 'petite' she would smack your 'ead, vieux grandpère," said Mademoiselle. "I know her. And I have told you that you need not speak French. You are not so ready with it when you don't want to make a show off."

"I'd offer you a cigarette in the governor's room," said Jimmy after lunch, "but Mam'selle would be quite likely to come in and kick up a fuss. They're very trying, these foreign women. But she's been with us so long one's got to humour her. We might go and sit by the tennis lawn till the girls come out. We can smoke there. It's away from the house."

"The Governor asked me not to smoke till I'm a bit older," said Young George, "but I'll watch you if you like."

"If you don't I won't," said Jimmy, putting his cigarette case back into his pocket.

"I wont tell anybody," said Young George.

"It isn't that," said Jimmy. "As a matter of fact I've been overdoing it a bit lately. Do me good to pull up a bit. I only suggested it to keep you company."

They sat on a garden-seat facing the tennis lawn, and talked for some time about school affairs, Jimmy showing himself less burdened by the weight of maturity as they did so. He reverted, however, to his air of experienced middle age when the talk veered round to the coming holidays, and home surroundings, and Young George said to him: "You know all the people living about here better than I do! What do you think of the Manserghs?"

"Old Mansergh's a grumpy old varmint," said Jimmy. "Bit of a flyer in his youth. Of course *she* isn't out of the top drawer, as anybody can see. She's a good-natured old thing though, wherever he picked her up. She always wants to stuff my pockets with chocolate creams, even now. I like the old thing."

"So do I," said Young George. "She isn't Dick's or Geoffrey's mother, though. What do you think of Dick?"

"Not a bad sort of fellow by any means," said Jimmy, "though a bit off-hand in his ways. Doesn't take much notice of chaps younger than himself. Still, he's a good sportsman, and they say he's a jolly good sailor too. Bound to go up the ladder if he sticks to it."

"He's always been very decent to me."

"Ah, that's because he's after B. You feel like that, you know, towards the brother of a girl you've taken a fancy to. I was always particularly careful to make myself pleasant to Bertie Pemberton. I shan't take so much trouble about it now, though he's not a bad chap either."

"You've spotted it, then!" said Young George in some surprise.

"My dear fellow, it's as plain as the nose on your face," said Jimmy.

"Well, I only did yesterday. How can you have spotted it? You've hardly ever seen them together."

"I saw quite enough, last holidays. The first thing I asked Vera when I came home this time was: 'How's that little affair between Dick Mansergh and B Grafton going?'"

"Oh, then it was Vera who told you! You do give yourself airs of knowing every damn thing, Jimmy. It makes one think twice about consulting you on anything."

"I was half pulling your leg," said Jimmy, with unwonted meekness. "As a matter of fact I did notice him paying a lot of attention to B, as long ago as last Christmas, when we had our play. She looked topping that night; I could hardly keep my eyes off her. If I hadn't been paying attention myself in another quarter—"

"It would be rather a good sort of marriage for her," said Young George. "Wilborough is a jolly place, and it's only three miles from Abington. It

would be jolly if she were to marry him and go and live there. We should see a lot of her."

"There's one thing I will say about you, George, you're a jolly good brother to your sisters. I admire you for it. Other fellows' sisters are all very well, but it isn't many chaps who think such a lot of their own as you do. I've half a mind to take a leaf out of your book, and make a bit of a fuss of mine. They're not so good-looking as yours, but they're not so bad. I thought Vera had improved a good lot when I came home."

There was a questioning note in his statement, but Young George did not catch it. "I think they're a very good-looking crowd," he said perfunctorily. "What I can't make out is whether B has taken to *him* or not."

"Ah, poor little girl!" said Jimmy sapiently. "She was knocked over by that affair last year. I don't suppose she's ready for it again yet."

"Well, you do know something, after all. That's just what Caroline said when I asked her."

"What, that she wasn't ready for it? You see, George, a girl's first affair is pretty serious with her. One or two of 'em have told me that. Of course she thinks it's the only one, and if she doesn't marry the fellow she'll never forget him, or care for anybody else, and all that sort of thing. When she's jolly well *got* to forget him, like B, she still goes on thinking that it can't happen to her again."

"H'm!" said Young George reflectively. "I'm not

quite sure that B isn't waking up. I'll tell you something if you'll swear not to repeat it."

Jimmy swore.

"I didn't tell Caroline. I thought I'd pump her first. But she wasn't giving much away."

"Women stick by one another," commented Jimmy.

"Well, he rode over to lunch yesterday, and I *know* he meant to stay for the afternoon, though he didn't actually say so. The Governor was up in London, and Caroline and the Dragon had gone over to lunch with Mollie Pemberton. Well, they made it pretty plain they didn't want me with them afterwards. B was as nice as possible about it—she always is decent with me—but—well, I needn't spin it out, but they went into the garden, and I found myself left."

"Wait a minute," said Jimmy. "Let's get it straight. It was B who got rid of you."

"Well, Dick did ask me if I'd be kind enough to take a message up to Worthing for him, but—yes, it was she who got me off."

"Did you go up to Worthing?"

"No, I knew he was over at Wilborough. He's agent there too, you know. I rather think Dick knew it as well as I did."

"Ah!" said Jimmy significantly.

"Then B asked me to be an angel and bring her some work she'd been doing, which was in the Long Gallery. So I went up there and couldn't find it, though I hunted about everywhere. At last I found it in her bedroom."

"You're jolly good to your sisters, George."

"Oh, well, they're very decent to me. I took it out, and they weren't anywhere to be seen."

"No, I suppose not. Well, if you ask me, I think it's a pretty clear case."

"I haven't told you everything yet. I didn't quite know what to do with myself, so I thought I'd go exploring. There are lots of funny attics and places up in the roof. I found a rummy little place I'd never seen before, where I shouldn't wonder if priests usen't to hide."

"Anything in it?"

"Only a dead bat. I suppose I was up there about half an hour. I'd got pretty mucky, and was just brushing some of it off by a little window, when I saw Dick coming out of the stables on his horse. I didn't see his face, but he looked as if he was waxy."

"That would be, what—an hour after lunch?"

"Yes, I should think about. Well, I came down the stairs from the attics into the corridor that goes round that corner, and there was B standing just behind the curtain of the window looking out after him."

"Did she see you?"

"Yes, of course. She was awfully annoyed, and said I'd given her a fright."

"What was her face like?"

"Well, to tell you the truth, I was so surprised at the way she slanged me that I didn't take much notice—except afterwards, and then I thought it was

all jolly rum, and that there must have been something else. And she was so decent about it afterwards, and said she was sorry she'd spoken to me like that, and asked me not to tell the others."

"Ah!" said Jimmy. "That tells a tale."

"Well, what do you think about it?" asked Young George.

"I think I'll have a cigarette, after all," said Jimmy.

"It helps you to think."

He lit one elaborately, and blew the smoke out of his nose with a reflective air, while Young George waited anxiously for the result of his deliberation.

"What happened was this, George," he said. "He proposed to her, and she meant him to. But she wasn't ready to give in at once, and he got annoyed. She gave him to understand that if he didn't like it he could lump it, not thinking he'd take it seriously. Now, lots of men don't know that you needn't take any account of what a girl says. It's often the opposite of what she means. Girls are like that. What you can say is that Mansergh didn't know enough. He gets shirty, and of course that simply makes her worse. Then he clears out, and the moment he's gone she's sorry. Was she crying, by the bye, when she was standing at the window?"

"No," said Young George doubtfully. "I'm not sure, though, now I come to think of it, that she didn't later on. She almost did when she apologised to me for slanging me."

"Poor little girl!" said Jimmy tenderly. "It

really makes you feel rather soft towards them, the way they show their feelings, doesn't it? I tell you, Grafton, a girl could do almost anything she liked with me—a pretty girl, that is—if she only knew her power, and how to use it. Never do to let them know, though. I think, myself, Mansergh was quite right not to let her get the bulge over him in that way, and to clear out."

"I thought you said just now that he cleared out because he didn't know enough."

"Well, he needn't have cleared out, perhaps. I should have shown her that it wouldn't wash, if it had been me, and she'd soon have given it up. Well, old man, I don't think there's much harm done. He'll come back again all right, and they'll make it up. And when two people make it up, in that condition—well, it's getting close on to the time for putting up the banns."

Voices were heard approaching from behind the shrubs, and one of them seemed to be talking a foreign language in a high-pitched authoritative voice, Jimmy hastily threw his cigarette away, and made no apology for doing so. "They'll want us to play tennis," he said. "We'd better go and get our shoes."

CHAPTER XI

THE SECOND LOVE

YOUNG GEORGE drove himself home with very pleasant recollections of his afternoon. He had found the Beckley girls quite humanly entertaining when out of sight and hearing of their 'awful old Mademoiselle,' and when Maggie Williams had joined the party they had all enjoyed themselves exceedingly. She was a pretty, lively girl, ready to amuse herself in whatever company should be provided for her, and had made it plain that she particularly liked that of Young George.

Young George felt that he was beginning to know what love really was. Memories of the way Maggie tossed her masses of dark hair, and looked when she spoke to him, out of her laughing eyes, beguiled his homeward journey. She was the only girl he had ever met worthy to be compared with his own sisters, and it was an addition to his pleasure that they approved of her. He had been a little anxious about that when he had first begun to think a good deal about her, because Jimmy had been so very contemptuous at the idea of taking notice of a girl of fourteen. But after Maggie had been over to Abington, and he had waited rather anxiously to hear the comments that might be made about her, Beatrix had said: "Dear old boy, I

think you have very good taste. She's much the prettiest girl anywhere about here, except us; and she's very nice too." And Barbara had said: "If I've got to lose you, Bunting, I'd as soon Maggie had you as anybody. I should scratch anybody else's eyes out."

Even Jimmy seemed to have waked up to Maggie's charm. He had taken a good deal more notice of her that afternoon than ever before, and had told Young George as he went off that he'd only been rotting when he had chaffed him about her. In the present unattached state of his affections, Young George had had a faint idea that Jimmy might be preparing to cut him out. But, although Maggie had responded frankly to his unusual attentions to her, it was Young George whose conversation and society she had obviously preferred. This memory gave him an agreeable sensation under the ribs as he went over the signs of it. Jimmy would not be able to cut him out, but it was satisfying to have his taste thus endorsed by a man of such wide experience in these affairs.

When he had nearly reached home and was driving up the road through the park, he descried two figures strolling through the fern towards him. He recognised them as Dick Mansergh and Beatrix, and either something in their attitude towards one another, although they were walking apart, or the thoughts upon which his own mind had been running, gave him the idea that whatever differences they may have had were at an end, and the engagement which he and Jimmy had

agreed would be such an eminently suitable one had come to pass.

And so it proved. Beatrix looked up at the sound of his wheels, and signalled to him, and both of them came across the grass to intercept him. Beatrix was smiling as she came up. "Bunting, darling, we've been waiting for you," she said.

Dick was smiling too. "We've got something to tell you," he said.

"Congrattars!" said Young George, rather shyly. "I know what it is."

Then Beatrix stretched up to him and kissed him, and Dick looked as if he wished he had been in his place, but did not claim a kiss for himself.

Young George commented upon this in a confidential talk with Caroline afterwards. "He strikes me as a strong sort of chap, who puts control over himself," he said. "I think that's what B wants, don't you?"

Caroline hesitated a little. "Yes, perhaps she does," she said. "You know, Bunting, it was rather a surprise to me when it did come. I didn't say much to you when you asked me yesterday, because I didn't think she was ready for it yet, though I thought she would be sooner or later."

"Don't you think she's in love with him, then?"

"She wouldn't want to marry him if she weren't."

"Perhaps he made her say she would. She looked pleased all right when she told me, but not—well, you know what I mean—sort of carried away."

Caroline sighed. "I wish he'd been the first," she said.

This was immediately after Young George had come home. Dick had driven himself over to luncheon. She and Beatrix and Miss Waterhouse had been in the Long Gallery when his name had been brought up, and Beatrix had said: "Oh, bother! I wanted to have a quiet afternoon." But over the luncheon table she had been in higher spirits than during the morning, when she had either been alone or sitting with them over her work, saying very little. This had given Caroline the idea that she was rather pleased that he had come over, after all, but had not in the least prepared her for what afterwards happened.

They had all gone out into the garden. Tennis had been suggested, but it was very hot, and there were only three of them. They had sat and talked together, and after a time Caroline had gone indoors, but not with the object of leaving them alone together. If he had wanted that, Beatrix had given no sign that she did.

She had come out an hour later, but they had gone off somewhere together. Tea was in the yew arbour, and as she was pouring it out, for herself and Miss Waterhouse, they had come up, and Dick had made his announcement. "Well, B and I have settled it up together. We're going to get married as soon as they'll let us."

Looking back upon what had followed, Caroline could not yet gauge all that lay beneath the matter-of-fact

air with which both of them treated the momentous event. With Dick, it was not so difficult. Probably Bunting had found the right solution of his steady unemotional way of bearing himself. He was a man of strong self-control, but there were signs in his voice and in his look that a great deal of ferment lay under the crust of his manner, and would become apparent if he were not under the compulsion of hiding it.

But why should he have been under that compulsion at such a time, when love had found its triumphant reward, and there was no one before whom he need hide his exultation?

How did Beatrix really stand towards him? She had always treated his obvious pursuit of her lightly, and never as if her heart had been in the least touched by his suit, though Caroline had believed that in time it might be. Dick had been a good deal in London during the latter part of the season, and he had been there because Beatrix was there, for it was not his habit to devote his leaves to a round of fashionable engagements. Beatrix had talked about him when she had returned home, but not as if he had made any further impression upon her. Nor had there been any difference in her attitude towards him since, though his visits had been more frequent and his suit presumably more pressing than before.

Certainly, Caroline thought, she had not intended to accept him that afternoon, and if she had admitted to herself a possibility that she might do so, Caroline

thought she would have divined it. Having accepted him, she was much as she had been before. She was bright, and contented, and complete mistress of herself. She talked of their father, and of others, friends and relations who might be expected to be pleased at her news. They had already sent off telegrams, going down to the village themselves before tea. They had both talked of an early marriage, and of where they would live, and of what she would do while Dick was at sea. She had been affectionate to Caroline, but had not responded to her little secret advances of love and sympathy, which no one else would have noticed but to which she would have answered readily enough if she had wanted to.

Caroline's heart was rather heavy. Beatrix had poured out all the tale of her love to her a year before, and afterwards relied on her more than any one to assuage her pain. Was she to be kept out of this new love altogether? Or was there no love that could be acknowledged and rejoiced over? Caroline would have little to offer if it was to be an affair of a suitable marriage only. Without love, it would not be so eminently suitable. In the future Beatrix would have the sort of place in the world to which her birth and connections entitled her. But in the meantime, as the wife of a sailor on active service, if she were to be with him as much as possible, she would be cut off from a great deal of what she had been accustomed to, and there would be no settling down for her anywhere. On the face of it, her life would be less in accordance

with her tastes as Dick's wife than Caroline's would be if she were to marry Francis Parry. And Caroline had told her father that if she had loved Francis, that wouldn't have mattered; she would have been happy with him anywhere, as Viola Prescott had been happy with her husband in surroundings little fitted for her. But without love it would matter—surely to Beatrix as much as to herself.

And Beatrix had loved so whole-heartedly and so tenderly, although she had had only a very short time to give herself up freely to the joy that had come to her. And after that, until the end had come, she had only had hope and the trust that was to be betrayed to uphold her; but still she had flowered and developed under it. Love meant very much to her. When the wounds left by the destruction of her first love had healed she must love again in some happy time. She could not do without it. Wasn't she laying up unhappiness for herself in taking a love that she could not return in full measure? And was it fair to the man who would want from her everything that it was in her to give to one whom she should love as she had loved once already?

Dick stayed to dinner, and the Prescotts came, and there was an air of excitement and anticipatory pleasure over the whole evening. Beatrix was in much higher spirits than she had been after the news had been broken to Caroline and Miss Waterhouse at tea time. She was flushed and sparkling, and talked continuously. Nor did she withhold from her lover those signs which

are so sweet to one who has gained the fulfilment of his hopes, when he has to share his loved one with others, but is made to feel that there is much for him alone. Dick's self-control was not so much in evidence now, however cautiously he seemed to be testing the ice of his happiness and finding it to bear. As a newly engaged couple they fully satisfied Viola Prescott, who said to Caroline in a confidential aside after dinner: "Isn't she adorable over it? I've never seen her look so lovely before. It's happiness that does it all."

But Caroline still bore a weight on her heart. She and Beatrix had been alone together for a short time before dinner, and Beatrix had given her some confidences. But they had not been such as to lighten the weight. "He's such a dear!" she had said. "I really had to accept him, though I hadn't meant to just yet. Now I'm glad I have. And I'm sure darling old Dad will be pleased."

These were not the confidences that she had given Caroline after her engagement to Lassigny. Their father had not been pleased, but his displeasure had not stemmed the outpourings of love. Now it seemed that to please him was of paramount importance. No answering telegram had come from him, and when Dick and the Prescotts had taken their departure Beatrix showed herself disturbed by this.

"Surely he can't be angry this time," she said, "because Dick didn't ask him first, I mean. That's what he didn't like—before. But he must have known

that Dick was coming here because of me, and he never tried to stop it, or said anything about it."

Caroline and Miss Waterhouse both reassured her. The telegram had gone to the Bank—not very early in the afternoon. He must have left before it came; and it had not been forwarded to him, or else it had not found him before the offices closed.

She came to Caroline's room for those preparations for the night which they made together when they wanted to talk. But there were no more confidences of any sort. It was her father whom she still talked of in connection with her engagement and marriage. And she talked of her marriage more than of her engagement, which she seemed to want cut short. With Lassigny she had been quite content to wait. She had talked very little of marriage, and had seemed to have formed no clear picture in her mind of what her life with him would be. She loved him and he loved her, and that was enough.

"Dick says I can come home as much as I like, while he is at sea. I know Dad will want to have me. I *wish* he had telegraphed. He won't think I don't love him as much as ever because I am going to leave him, will he? I love him a thousand times more. I told Dick he must never take me away from him for very long."

"What does Dick feel about Dad?" asked Caroline, remembering what her father had said to her on that subject when they had ridden together.

"Oh, he loves him. He told me he had first come

over here because he liked him so much. It wasn't me until later—not very much later, though. It was nearly love at first sight, but not quite. He says he doesn't think there is such a thing really. If there is, it isn't the best sort of love, because it's only what a person looks like. I'm rather frightened, you know, finding what sort of person Dick thinks I am. I hope I shall be able to live up to it."

"It won't want living up to, darling, if you love him. You'll only have to be yourself. That would be enough for any man."

Beatrix flung her arms round her neck and kissed her warmly. "*You* know I'm not perfect, darling," she said. "But you love me all the same, don't you?"

For a moment, as she clung to her, Caroline thought that there were to be the real confidences for which she was aching. She returned her embrace, with her heart in her throat. But Beatrix drew herself away. "He does love me; and I love him," she said, with an air of finality. But there had been ever so little of a pause between the two statements.

Grafton's telegram came early the next morning. "Delighted, my darling; love and blessings. Have wired to Dick, shall be down this evening. Bring him to meet me."

It was Thursday, and he had not intended to come down until the following day. There was no doubt about the pleasure the news had given him. Beatrix went about the house singing.

Late that evening Caroline came down to talk to

her father, who was reading in the library over a last pipe. One of the signs of his changed habits was the considerable diminution of his cigar bill.

He looked up with a smile of pleasure. "Why, my darling child," he said, "I thought you were in bed long ago. Have you been talking it all over with B?"

"No," she said. "I thought I'd come and talk it all over with you, Dad."

He laid aside his book. "Well, it's all very satisfactory, isn't it?" he said. "Rather different from last time! We weren't in such a happy state a year ago."

"It wasn't quite a year ago," she said. "And it isn't six months ago since she was so much in love with somebody else."

"I know. I knew she'd get over it. But I confess I didn't think she'd get over it quite so quickly."

She didn't reply. He looked at her, and asked: "What's the matter, darling? Aren't you pleased about it? She *has* got over that other business, hasn't she?"

"If you mean, does she love him any more, of course she doesn't. But I don't think she has got over it all the same. It has altered her."

She had drawn a chair close up to his and was leaning against it. He took her hand. "Darling child," he said, "you're too sensitive. You're feeling losing her. She hasn't talked to you enough about it. But she will, you know, when she has settled down."

"She has talked to you, hasn't she, Dad?"

"Yes, she's talked to me. Nobody could have been sweeter than she was. I'm very lucky in my daughters, Cara. Both of you—all three of you—know that you can come to me and tell me about these things that girls don't usually confide to their fathers. You've done it, and now B has done it. She didn't do it last time. That shows what a right marriage this is, and what a wrong one that would have been."

"She would have done it, last time, darling, if you hadn't stopped it."

His pressure on her hand that he was holding relaxed. "Surely—" he began, but she caught him up hurriedly: "Oh, I don't mean that you weren't right to stop it; but *how* has she talked to you about Dick—and her engagement to him?"

He smiled, and gave her hand a little squeeze. "Why, just in the way that would most please an affectionate parent," he said. "I like Dick immensely; I think he's a fine fellow, and there's a lot more in him than appears on the surface. But she spared me rhapsodies about him. She knew, I suppose, that I could take all that for granted, and should be soothed by being made to feel that I hadn't got to give up everything to him. She's my darling child still, and always will be. And, as I told you, I like Dick well enough to take him in. They'll both be to me what your dear mother and I were to her father. I don't think I could love B any more than I do now. But though I'm giving her up I shan't love her any less. And I shan't mind giving her up. I'm happier—for my own sake—about her

than I was when I first had her news. She has what she wants to make her happy, and she has given me all I want to make me happy."

"I'm so glad, Dad," she said. "And though I suppose she'll be away a lot just at first, by and bye they will be living here, and you'll see as much of her as you want."

She led him on to talk of the surface facts of the engagement. The marriage would take place, and it was well for him that he thought as he did about it. She had wondered if he would see, as she thought she saw, that Beatrix was fixing her own mind upon those surface facts, and what his wisdom would make of her chance of happiness if she had not brought the deep love that she had it in her to bring to her betrothal. But he had not seen it, though what he was pleased with in her confidences to him only confirmed Caroline's own mistrust. The rhapsodies that she had dispensed him from listening to would surely have been sounded if the impulse towards them had been there. She would have asked for his loving sympathy in what filled her own mind, and shown her love for him in asking for it just as much as by assuring him of that love.

But she was glad for his sake that he had seen nothing. She kissed him good-night, and said: "When B goes there'll only be you and me, Daddy, till Barbara comes home. I shan't leave you for a long time yet."

CHAPTER XII

CAROLINE AND BEATRIX

It was nearly twelve o'clock when Caroline went up to her room. Her mind was calmed by her talk with her father. She loved him so much that his contentment could hardly fail of some reflection in her. And, though jealousy was far removed from her, it gave her pleasure to think that when Beatrix had left him he would need her love and companionship more. Perhaps it was, as he had said, she was feeling hurt that Beatrix had not come to her for the deep love and sympathy that was there for her in her joys as well as in her troubles. Although her sympathies had not been undivided in that trouble of a year ago, for she had believed that her father had been right and had felt for him during a period of something like estrangement as much as she had felt for Beatrix in being parted from her lover, still her heart had beaten much closer to her sister's then than it did now. Beatrix had leant upon her. She had been wayward; perhaps she had even been selfish. She had often hurt Caroline, when the hurt in herself had made her hard and unreasonable towards all but the one who could then have assuaged it. But Caroline had gone through it all with her, and loved her all the more for having shared her pain. It was rather hard if she was to

be held at arm's length now, after having given so much, and being ready to give so much.

Her sadness came upon her again when she had shut herself into her room and made ready for bed. She heard her father go upstairs, and the house became quite still. The clock of the church began to strike, and the clock on the stable turret chimed in on a fainter, quicker note. Before they had finished, the door of her room opened and startled her wildly. It was Beatrix, who came in, a figure all in white, and threw herself into her arms, and clung to her sobbing.

For a moment Caroline felt giddy with the shock of her surprise, and the fear of what was coming. But she rallied herself and murmuring soft words drew Beatrix to the bed and sat there holding her to her breast.

"I've been such an *awful* beast to you, darling," Beatrix sobbed, "I had to come and ask you to forgive me. I couldn't sleep till I told you how much I love you."

The childish confession made Caroline inclined to laugh and cry at the same time, but brought with it such a sense of relief as was almost bliss to her troubled mind.

"I know you have wanted me to tell you everything," Beatrix went on, her sobs becoming less frequent, "and I've wanted to all the time. But something horrid in me kept it back, and I know I've hurt you frightfully, darling, and I shall never forgive myself for it as long as I live."

Caroline swept the hair from her forehead and kissed her lovingly, as her mother might have done. She felt immeasurably older than her sister, who seemed to her a little child again. "If you tell me now, my darling!" she said tenderly.

Beatrix sat up, and wiped her eyes on the sleeve of Caroline's light dressing-gown. "Yes, I will. I want to," she said, in a pathetic voice. "It's only you I can tell everything to."

She bent her head and played with the ribbon that lay across Caroline's knee. "I know what you have thought," she said. "I didn't seem to be noticing, or to care, but I felt it all through me all the time. I couldn't be such a hard-hearted beast as not to mind what you were thinking, darling."

A few more tears and answering caresses, and she told her story, with her head on Caroline's shoulder, and Caroline's arm round her.

"I don't think I've behaved very well to Dick," she said. "I knew that he loved me very much, and yet I played with him. Perhaps I even led him on. But I didn't know how much he really did love me, or I wouldn't have done it. He's so strong and so deep; it was like playing with fire. Perhaps I didn't do anything very wrong till two days ago, for though I'd let him talk to me I hadn't given him any idea that I—that I wanted him to go any further. He has told me since that he would never have asked me to marry him unless I had said or done something to make him think that he could. I suppose I saw that it was like

that. I felt, somehow, that he was trying to bend me to his will—no, not that, but there was something in him that *I* couldn't move. And that vexed me. Oh, I was a beast! We went into the garden; I'd sent Bunting away so that I could show him I wanted to be alone with him. Then I led him on to tell me that he loved me; and at last he did. Then—oh, I hate myself for what I did."

She stopped, and cried again on Caroline's shoulder. Caroline soothed her, but felt her heart growing heavy again.

"Well, I must tell you everything," she began again, "but I wish I hadn't got it to tell. It spoils everything. When he told me that he loved me, and asked me to marry him, I pretended to be very surprised, and said that I'd no idea of marrying him. He was very quiet, and let me go on. I said I didn't love him; I had had enough of that sort of love, and only loved you, and Dad, and the others. I can't think what made me go on like that. I was a *fool*. But he stopped me suddenly. He was very angry. He said I had known quite well that he would say what he had, and that I had meant him to, and that I wasn't what he had thought I was. Then he went away, without saying good-bye or anything.

"I was frightened then, and—and ashamed of myself, because what he had said was true. And I didn't want him to go away altogether. I thought perhaps after all I did love him a little. Oh, I don't know what I thought. But I went upstairs to the window

to look at him coming from the stables—he had ridden over—and to see what he looked like. And Bunting came down from the attic and caught me there, but of course he didn't know what I was doing, and he startled me so much that I flew out at him."

She laughed a little. "Poor darling Bunting!" she said. "I startled *him*. I don't think he has ever seen me like that before. But I told him I was sorry afterwards, and he was awfully sweet about it and said it didn't matter a damn. I think he'd have been still more surprised if he'd known what I was there for. Fortunately he wasn't near enough to the window to see Dick.

"Well, then, I was rather miserable, but I was angry too at the way he had spoken to me. Sometimes I was one and sometimes I was the other, and I didn't know whether I cared for him or not. The next morning it had all calmed down rather, and I made up my mind I wouldn't care whether he came back or not, and that if he did I would behave just as I had before, and pretend that nothing had happened. I don't know whether I should have been able to keep that up if he hadn't come to lunch next day. When Jarvis brought up his name I was glad, though I don't think I showed it, did I?"

Caroline reminded her of what she had said, and she smiled and said she thought she had hidden it very well, and by the way he behaved she thought he intended to ignore what had happened too.

"I was a little frightened when you went indoors

and left me alone with him," she said. "But for some time he went on talking as if he had forgotten everything, and I was rather grateful to him, and felt that I did like him very much. He's so strong and—and self-controlled; and I admire strong men, who won't let you play with them. I had had enough of that. I didn't want to play with him any more, and I wanted him to see that I was sorry, without having to say so. So I suppose I was extra nice to him. And I did want him at least as a friend.

"Then suddenly he said something. That's his way—when you're not expecting it. He said perhaps he'd made a mistake about me yesterday, but he didn't think he'd been altogether mistaken. If I didn't love him very much now, he wanted me all the same, and he was sure he could make me happy. Would I marry him and let him try?

"It was the last thing I expected. I didn't know what to say or what to think. Then he said that he shouldn't worry me with love-making until I was ready for it. He said in his quiet deep sort of way, 'When you are, my dear, you'll have all you can want,' and he made me feel, somehow, that perhaps I should come to want it—from him, I mean."

She stopped for a moment as if she were examining herself. "I can't think now what made me say, yes," she said. "I didn't feel in the least like I did when I—when I said yes, before. I think if he had—had kissed me, or treated me as if I had already given him everything, I should have drawn back, perhaps run

away from him. But he just took both my hands, and looked me straight in the face and said: 'Thank you; I promise you that you shall never be sorry for it.' Oh, he is good—and strong. I think I do love him. If you'd seen the look in his eyes! It touched me, and made me want to cry. I think if he had kissed me then, I shouldn't have minded."

"Hasn't he kissed you at all?" Caroline asked. The heaviness of heart which the beginning of the story had brought her had lightened. It would not have been told her in just that way if Beatrix had come to her to ask her help in extricating herself from an impossible position. And yet she had been inclined to think that it had been all a mistake, and had better be ended, for the sake of Beatrix's happiness.

"I'm coming to that, darling. You must let me tell it to you all as it happened."

Caroline kissed her again. As her heart grew lighter, the channels of her love were clearing.

"We went and walked in the garden," Beatrix went on. "We talked about what we would do when we were married—where we should live, and all that. I felt quite pleased and excited. It was something going to happen. I think only one part of me was working. And I felt as if I'd come to anchor. You know, darling, I *haven't* enjoyed myself this year, as I did last. *That* had spoilt everything for me. I think if I had lived quietly at home, as you have, it might have been different. But I'm rather tired of going about, and remembering *that* all the time. I don't want *him* any

longer—of course. I hate him. But what I thought he was—having somebody all my own who would love me, and I would do all I could to make him happy—I suppose if you've once wanted that you always want it; and a home of your own, and children of your own to love."

"Yes, I know, dearest," said Caroline softly. She was longing to come to the point at which Beatrix might show her that all that, which lies before women made of their clay as the ultimate end of their lives, would come to Beatrix through the only gate which leads to its perfect fulfilment. She had thought at one time that it might be taken by a deliberate choice of a partner, and that the love that would sweeten it might come afterwards. But she thought differently now. Beatrix herself had taught her. That first love of hers, broken off as it had been, had been the right beginning; it would have led her through the only gate. Would this second adventure take her into the right path? If not, she might get much in life that would satisfy her; she would bend herself to it, and the world might not see that she had not all. But it would change her. She would not grow to the full stature of her true womanhood. Secondary things would be put above primary, for primary things would be out of her reach. It was not for such a one as Beatrix to make a merely satisfactory marriage.

The word she had been longing for came sooner than she had expected. "I won't go over it all any

more," Beatrix said. "You saw what I was all last night and all to-day. I thought I should be able to keep it up, but I know now I couldn't have. Sometimes when I have been with him I felt like crying, because he was so matter-of-fact about everything, and I knew he wasn't really feeling like that, but was longing for me to give him a chance of being different. But I remembered what I had done before, and I wasn't sure that I really wanted him to—to make love to me.

"It was when he went away to-night. You know I went to see him out. I think if he had gone as he did last night—just as if we weren't engaged at all—I couldn't have gone on with it, I was feeling so miserable. Perhaps I looked at him in a way that showed him; for he looked at me as he was saying good-night. I saw by his eyes how much he loved me, and he kissed me very gently, on the forehead, and called me something sweet which I won't tell you; and then he went away."

"Oh, darling, I'm so glad," said Caroline. "I know by the way you tell me that it was what you really wanted all the time, wasn't it?"

"I don't know whether I did want it all the time. I know I should have been miserable if he had gone away without. And I wished when I'd gone upstairs that I'd given him something in return, some sign just to show that I didn't want him to go back to that horrid cold talk of to-day and yesterday. Do you think he will? He's not so *frightfully* strong, after

all. I'm sure he never meant to show me what he did. He couldn't keep it under."

Caroline laughed gently at her. "Yes, he is strong," she said, "with the right sort of strength. He wouldn't have shown you that, if you hadn't shown him something first. Oh, darling, you do love him, don't you? You wouldn't be going to marry him if you didn't."

Beatrix didn't answer at once. "I suppose I'm frightened to let myself go," she said. "I did before, and it's as if something had got stopped up in me. I don't feel towards him as I did, and with *him*, though I admire and trust him a thousand times more. Will it come, Cara, dear? Can I go on, without doing him harm? He's so good and so fine, he *ought* to have somebody who would simply worship him, and think of nobody else; not somebody who has already thought of somebody else, somebody not to be compared with him."

Caroline wouldn't tell her that she thought it would all come. She knew it would, because now she saw that it was already there, though it was struggling for life through the dead waste of a once living but now withered love. "It's what you feel now, darling, that matters," she said. "I think something has been going on in you all the time that you can't recognise, because it's different from what it was."

"Do you think that's it?" she asked rather pathetically. "I hope it is. It isn't that I want all *that* to come back, though it did make me very happy while

it lasted. But I don't want to disappoint him. I don't want to give him something, just because I feel like it for the moment, and then take it away again."

"If you give him something because you feel like it—well, that's just what you'll be right in doing, darling. It wouldn't be right to hold it back. If you feel like it at any time, it shows it's there. I'm sure he's worth loving, B."

"Oh, yes, he is. I think I do love him. I know I want him to come back to-morrow."

Those were the words that rang in Caroline's ears when Beatrix had left her; comforted, and assured of her forgiveness for the horrid way in which she had behaved herself towards her. Poor little B! It would all have been so different if this had been the first time she had trodden the happy path of love. She was all softness and sweetness, made to capitulate to a strong man's wooing. But she had been bruised and torn, and there were sensitive places in her which shrank from the lightest touch. Her lover would not get the full response from her until he had taught her not to fear his touch on them.

But she wanted him to come back. Her heart was fluttering out to meet him. Its wings would grow stronger.

He came early the next morning. He had walked the three miles from Wilborough, where breakfast was earlier than at Abington, because any other mode of progression would have brought him there before it

was convenient, and yet he wanted to be moving. Beatrix had gone down the ferny glade towards the gate in the wall that led into the park, not expecting to meet him so soon, but because she also felt it necessary to be in motion, and that was the way he would probably come.

She was close upon the gate when he opened it and came through. His face looked as if it had been suddenly struck with a bright light as he saw her. But he hesitated a moment before he spoke. He was still putting constraint on himself.

She saw the sudden bright look, and the change, and it moved her profoundly. She was rather taken by surprise too, for she had not expected to see him, though she had come down through the park with no other purpose. But she smiled at him and said: "Here I am, you see, waiting for you."

Was it an invitation? He couldn't tell. He had not been prepared for it. He smiled at her in return. "You won't often have to wait for me," he said. "If I had thought you would be out so early I would have motored over."

Then she turned, and they walked slowly back towards the house together. At first both of them were at a loss what to say.

She slipped her hand into his arm. It came natural to her to do so; it was so she walked with her father, and she no longer felt afraid of Dick. He was dependent on her, and he was her friend.

He flushed under his brown skin, and looked down

at her. She was not wearing her hat with the broad brim to-day, and he could see her face. Since he had gained her promise he had seen it excited, merry, pleased sometimes, sometimes it had hurt him to think a little frightened, and once, as it had thrilled him all through the night to remember, appealing. But he had not seen it smooth and calm as it was now. The attitude of both of them seemed to be reversed. It was she who was sure of herself, and he who was in perturbation.

"We'll have a long day together," she said. "We'll do whatever you like. Would you like to fish? If so, I'll be your gillie. I often land Dad's fish for him, and I know exactly what to do."

All he said was, "Yes, I should like that," but his voice trembled, and his happiness was almost too much for him. She was offering him that sweet confiding companionship which he had thought he would only attain to through long and troubled effort, when by difficult repression of his strong desires he should have taught her that she might safely give it to him. If he could have it now, offered to him of her own free-will, surely the rest would come! But he could wait; he could wait for a long time if he might have this.

To all outward seeming they might have been married for months, and reached that happy state in which perfect community of taste and understanding doubles the pleasure of any common pursuit, as they followed the stream and tempted the trout in its pools and shallows. Beatrix was as eager and interested as

if she had been fishing with her father, and as merry and talkative. He loved her so like that, and was so happy with her that he sometimes forgot how much he loved her. He seemed to forget it altogether when at last he hooked a big fish, and drew it towards the bank, and she was not clever enough in manipulating her landing net. He ordered her about as if she had been a small boy, and rather a stupid one, and when the fish was landed and was lying on the grass with its gills opening and shutting, she burst out laughing. "If *that's* the way you're going to treat me!" she exclaimed.

She looked so adorable, her face flushed and her eyes sparkling, that all his prudent resolves vanished. He caught her and kissed her, just once, and let her go. "That's the way I'm going to treat you," he said, "and you've got to learn to put up with it."

She was taken by surprise. She looked at him, and then she smiled. "I think I shall learn in time," she said.

CHAPTER XIII

PARIS

GRAFTON went over to Paris to fetch Barbara, and Caroline and Young George went with him. It was decided almost at the last minute. Young George had no particular opinion of foreign parts, and was enjoying every moment of his time at home. But Jimmy, who came over on Friday to pay a formal call of congratulation to Beatrix, advised him not to be an ass. "A couple of days in Paris clears the cobwebs off a man's brain," he said. "England's the best place in the world, of course, but you're apt to get provincial if you don't run over to France occasionally. You see things from a different point of view." So Young George was persuaded. They would only be away from Saturday till Monday, and on the whole it would be rather a lark. He wanted to see Barbara too. There were lots of things to talk to her about, and he had never before come home for his holidays without finding her there to meet him. He had missed her during the first few days, more than he would have thought possible.

They arrived in Paris in the afternoon and descended at the Meurice. Leaving Caroline and her maid there, Grafton and Young George went off in a taxi-auto to collect Barbara from her 'family' which, though

somewhat decayed in fortune, still inhabited its ancestral hotel in the Faubourg Saint Germain. There was a Monsieur le Comte and a Madame la Comtesse, and a daughter of about Barbara's age. There were also half a dozen young English girls whom Madame la Comtesse made a great favour of receiving, but whose parents contributed the bulk of the income necessary to keep up the ancient dignity of the name. It was the genuine French family life which these English girls, also of irreproachable ancestry—that was a *sine qua non*, or announced to be—were invited to share, and which Barbara said was as dull as ditchwater. They had their professors, and were taken about here and there, and they talked French. English was not permitted. Not a word was allowed to be spoken even among themselves, except as a special concession going to and from church on Sundays. As none of them were Catholics, Madame probably thought the greater sin might on these occasions include the lesser.

Barbara had altered; not in her affectionate impetuosity, for she almost overwhelmed her father and brother with the warmth of her embraces. But her hair, if not yet 'up' was no longer 'down.' She had grown taller and slimmer; she wore her pretty clothes as if she took an interest in them; and her speech and manner were the tiniest little bit affected by her three months' absence from English influences, though this she indignantly denied when Young George taxed her with putting on French frills.

"But as for French frills," she said, "there will be

something to be said about that later, but not to either of you. Why didn't my darling Caroline come to fetch me? Oh, I *am* glad to see you, my darling old Daddy, and you too, my adorable Bunting. I wish the taxi was closed; I'd hug you both again. I haven't had half enough yet."

They had already told her about Beatrix's engagement, and she had expressed herself delighted. Now she wanted to hear more, and there was not much more to tell her. "Oh, well, I'll get it all out of Caroline," she said. "How's that little ass Jimmy Beckley?"

"You'll be able to talk French to him. He's jolly good at it," said Young George.

"I *don't* think," said Barbara. "No more French till I come back here. Oh, how lovely it is to be going home! Can't we start to-morrow, Dad?"

"What do you think we've come here for?" asked Grafton. "We are going to enjoy ourselves."

"Oh, yes. I'd forgotten that Paris was supposed to be a gay city. I think it's the dullest hole in the world. Look, there's the Odéon. Oh, what a thing to call itself a theatre! We get taken there, you know. We saw 'Esther' last week. It was like going to church. Are we going to see something amusing to-night, Dad? I believe there *are* amusing theatres to go to in Paris."

"I believe there are," said Grafton. "Yes, we'll go somewhere."

"I say, you know, this isn't half bad," said Young

George as they sped across the Tuileries gardens, with the great purple mass of the Louvre on one side of them and the gay flower beds on the other, with the long vista up to the Arc de Triomphe. "I like it better than Hyde Park." Which was a great concession for so sturdy an Englishman.

"There's a concert every afternoon in a sort of open-air theatre," said Barbara. "We go there sometimes. Perhaps I shouldn't mind Paris so much if I weren't in a family. But how joyful it will be to get back to England again! I'm longing for bacon for breakfast. I think French food is much overrated."

They dined early, at the 'Ambassadeurs,' and Barbara said that the food was better than she was accustomed to. They were a merry, talkative quartette, and people looked at them admiringly and talked about them. Those young English girls, with their fair hair and their delicious colouring—when they began to be beautiful they almost exaggerated it. There were not a few who would have liked to make the *entente cordiale* that evening with this English group.

They went to the Opéra Comique and heard 'Louise,' that poignant story in which a daughter's love brings a father's sorrow. They were all fond of music and knew something about it, even Young George, who had asked for an opera rather than a play. He and Barbara chatted gaily between the acts, but Caroline, whose sensitive fibre responded to the emotion of those she loved, divined that her father was moved by the music, and the unfolding of the story. Before

the last act, in which Louise finally forsakes the father who has loved her and whom she has loved, dying in his room, Grafton said: "I think I've had enough. I'll stay outside and smoke; and wait for you."

He and Caroline had read what was coming, sitting in a corner of the *foyer*. "Let's all go home," she said. "I expect Barbara and Bunting would just as soon. They have lots to talk about."

Barbara and Bunting made no objection, and as it was still early they went to supper at Henry's round the corner. Barbara said that evidently Madame la Comtesse didn't know what cooking was.

When Caroline and Barbara were alone that night, Barbara said: "That was rather a beastly play for Dad to see. I suppose that's why we came away before the end. I hope B isn't behaving towards him as she did last time."

Caroline was surprised. She had not credited Barbara with that amount of intuition. "No, he's happy about B," she said. "And he likes Dick immensely."

"I said it would be B when we first set eyes on Dick, you know," Barbara said.

Caroline remembered that she had, and laughed. "You're very far-sighted, darling," she said.

"Well, I do keep my eyes open," said Barbara. "I know I'm a *jeune fille*, and all that sort of thing, but I'm not a *jeune* fool. I suppose Louise wasn't married to that posturing poopstick?"

Caroline did not reply to this question. "It was rather too sad," she said, "though the music was

lovely. I think I should have stuck to the nice old father if I'd been Louise."

"I'm quite sure I should," said Barbara. "I think the whole business is awful tommy-rot."

Caroline imagined her to be commenting upon the emotions and attractions of love, and left it there.

The next day they motored out to Versailles, lunched there, and saw the fountains play, and the crowds. On their way back they had tea at a restaurant in the Bois, and saw more crowds. In the evening they went out to the Parc Montsouris, on the very outskirts of Paris, and dined there in the open.

"Food and people," said Barbara. "Food and people all the time. Now I know what Paris really means."

The little restaurant on the edge of the Parc Montsouris is not very widely known, and the park itself is right away from everywhere. There were half a dozen tables laid on the verandah, and some people already dining there. But they were not of the highest fashion, which forsakes Paris in the month of August.

They went to feed the ducks by the lake, while their dinner was being prepared. As they came back a man and a woman came out on to the verandah with the *patron* in deferential attendance. The man was in evening dress, and the woman beautifully gowned. It was she who was doing the talking, in the most voluble of Parisian French, while the *patron* was shrugging his shoulders and answering her with a sly, quick

manner, apparently annoying to her, but amusing to her companion.

He had his back half turned towards the Graftons, but as they approached the verandah he moved. It was Lassigny, and he saw them as plainly as they all saw him.

"We'll go across the bridge," said Grafton. "I don't suppose dinner's quite ready yet." He turned his back on the restaurant, and his children followed him.

They saw by his face, which was dark and angry, that he wanted nothing said about the meeting. When they came back a little later, their dinner was ready, but Lassigny and his companion were not there.

The incident was soon forgotten by Barbara and Young George as they all made merry over their meal. But Caroline knew that her father had been deeply disturbed by it, in spite of his successful efforts to amuse them. She saw once or twice that reminiscent frowning look come over his face which she had only known during the time that Beatrix had been waiting for Lassigny. He had never worn it before, nor since the news of Lassigny's marriage in America had come to them and broken it all off short. It troubled her to see it again now. Surely he must know that it was all over with Beatrix! It was awkward having met Lassigny like that. But they would not see him again, or, if they did in London, they need take no notice of him. Apparently that was what he wished, as well as her father.

The dusk came on, and the park emptied itself. The lawns and the water seen between the tree trunks were silvered by the moon to mysterious beauty. "It's like a scene in a play," said Barbara. "Do let's have one more little walk round, Dad."

She and Young George hurried off to the lake, while Grafton paid the bill, and Caroline stayed with him. Then they followed the other two.

Caroline slipped her hand into her father's arm. "Darling," she said, "don't let it worry you—meeting him. It's bound to have happened some time or other. We've got it over now."

"I'm glad B wasn't here," was all he said.

"So am I. But if she had wanted curing, I think that would have cured her. Fancy choosing that for his wife, after knowing B!"

"It wasn't his wife," he said quickly.

Caroline was silent, blushing to the roots of her hair in the darkness. Then she said: "I think I should have come to know that—afterwards. I felt there was something. Oh, Dad, supposing it had been B he had married, and that had happened!"

"Yes," he said. "And your Aunt Katharine and Mary and the rest of them were all at me for trying to stop it. And B almost cut herself off from me, because—because I knew what would happen if she did marry him."

She was struck with compunction because she also had thought him not altogether reasonable in his dislike for Lassigny, whom he had not disliked, but had

invited to his house, before his engagement to Beatrix. She had liked him herself, and had known him longer than Beatrix had. Now she had a horror of him. All her soul, unsullied by the thought of evil, revolted against what had been forced upon it. Her father had known all along what he was. It had not prevented his treating him as a friend, or permitting him to associate with his daughters. She put that fact away in her mind, for consideration later. But he too had revolted, when it had come to giving up one of his daughters to him. And yet, as he had said, all the pressure had been against him, and if Lassigny had come back for Beatrix at the end of the six months in which it had been agreed he was not to see her, he would have given her up to him.

What were men like, under the surface they presented to the women who gave them their friendship and confidence—men who lived in the world of Lassigny, yes, and of Francis Parry, and Dick, and most of those among whom she had made her friends? She felt shaken by this glimpse she had had into what lay beneath all the commerce of life as she had known it, the life of pleasure, innocent enough to her and such as her, but lived on a crust of artificiality through which one's foot might slip at any time. Beneath it there were untold depths of mire in which one might even be engulfed, as Beatrix had nearly been engulfed. Her pleasure in those days in Paris was spoiled. She longed for the sure ground of her quiet country life, in which one lived from day to day occupying and

interesting one's self in one's duties and quiet pleasures, with the beauties and changes of nature to freshen the spirit, and all around the lives of others with which one could mingle, and trust them not to contain shameful secrets.

So she thought of it, not yet taught by age and experience that evil is everywhere where men and women are congregated together, and may rear its head in a country village as well as in a foreign city.

As she and Barbara were alone together that night, Barbara said seriously: "I can't think how B can ever have liked Lassigny. I never did. Although I didn't know anything in those days, I felt it about him all the same."

Caroline suddenly saw Barbara with new eyes. She and Bunting had always been called 'the children,' and treated as such; and up till the time Barbara had left home, only three months before, she had been a tomboy, sexless almost, certainly with no appeal that would bring out the deeper feminine confidences. But she had always had a shrewd eye for character, and Caroline remembered that she had avoided Lassigny's society when he had stayed at the Abbey with a large party of guests, saying that there were other men she liked better.

But now she was a woman, with a woman's sensibilities, though her childish freedom of speech and some of her childish ways still clung to her. The very alteration in her appearance, slight as it had seemed at first, marked a stage in her growth. She stood by the

window, fingering a chain she had taken off. In her pretty evening frock, nearly as long as Caroline's own, she seemed already to be 'grown up.' Caroline saw her as a companion to her such as Beatrix had been, one whom she could treat as an equal in understanding, if not in experience, and not as a much younger sister from whom many things must be kept.

"Of course I know what sort of woman that was he was with," Barbara went on. "You don't live in Paris even as I have to, without knowing the difference. I hate it all; and I hate him. Why couldn't B see?"

"I don't know," said Caroline slowly. "But I didn't see either."

Barbara looked up quickly, and a soft look came into her face. "You're so sweet and good, darling," she said. "You know, I believe that I see more in some ways than you and B—I don't mean horrid things like that, but all sorts of things—about people, I mean."

"I think you have more brains than either I or B," said Caroline, with a smile.

"I don't think it's brains so much. I don't know what it is, quite. I know I'm not so *nice* as you, or B either."

They had begun to undress, helping one another. Caroline kissed her. "You're every bit as nice, darling, and much cleverer."

"I'm sharp, and amusing," she said. "Perhaps I'm rather too sharp. I shouldn't like people to be afraid of me because of my tongue. I'd much rather

be like you, and have everybody love me. Cara, when B gets married, you and I will be a lot to each other, won't we? I shall be quite grown up by the time I come home for good; I'm nearly grown up now. I suppose I shall always be much the same with Bunting, but I want to be something different with you."

"Darling, it's just what I've been thinking about. I shall miss B awfully, when she goes; but I shall have you, to make up. And I think it's quite true that you can see more into things than I can—some things. Dad told me once I hadn't got a masculine brain."

"No, you're all feeling. But it's right feeling. I don't believe you would ever have fallen in love with Lassigny, though you didn't dislike him as I did. I'm never quite so sure about B. Of course I love her awfully, and she's very sweet, and good, too. But I think she wants somebody to look after her. Do you think Dick is the right man for her?"

"Why, don't you? It's you who can judge."

"Well, then, I do, on the whole. I think he'll want to be master, absolutely. He has that sort of strength. He wouldn't do for me, even if I loved him, and all that. I should want somebody I could be more equal with. But I think it will suit B—to adapt herself to what he wants. The only thing I'm not quite sure about is whether he'll give her exactly the sort of life she wants. He has his job and he is keen on it; and of course she won't take an *enormous* interest in that, though she'll like to see him go up in it. Then he likes country life, and she doesn't particularly. She likes

going about much more than you do. I don't quite see B settling down and living at Wilborough most of her life."

Caroline was rather struck by this view. "You've thought it out," she said.

"Yes, I like thinking things out. Of course I may be all wrong because I don't take all this *love* business enough into account. That may alter everything."

Caroline laughed outright. "You think it's all tommy-rot, don't you?" she asked.

"Well, I know it can't be, really, because it seems to take the most sensible people. I suppose most of them get married because of it, at least in England. But I should *think*—I don't know—that the happiest husbands and wives are those that like the same sort of thing, not those that are most in love with each other to begin with."

"I used to think that," said Caroline. "I'm not sure that I do now. I have never loved anybody—in the way that B has, I mean—so perhaps I don't know more than you do about it. But I do think it ought to begin with that. I suppose marriage isn't just having a companion you like. If it were I shouldn't want to marry at all, because I have just the companionship I want at home."

"Francis Parry wanted to marry you, didn't he?"

"You're very sharp, darling," said Caroline with a smile. "I didn't know you'd noticed anything."

"You and B have always treated me rather too much like a baby. I haven't minded much, or perhaps

you wouldn't have, for I should have talked to you about things more. But it's going to be different now. There are lots of things I shall want to talk to you about. I like Francis; but I'm rather glad you didn't marry him, all the same. I think he'd have made exactly the right husband for B, though."

Caroline laughed. "That's a new idea," she said. "Do you think Dick would have made exactly the right husband for me?"

"Well, yes, I do," was Barbara's rather surprising answer. "You'll be happier settled down, when you do marry."

"You don't settle down much as a sailor's wife."

"No, but he'll live at Wilborough by and bye, or his wife will. That would suit you. It would be like going on living at Abington. But Francis would live sometimes in London and sometimes in the country, and he and his wife would go about a lot. That's just what would suit B."

"Well, it just shows that love has most to do with it, after all," said Caroline. "I like Dick, too, but I should never want to marry him. If I had to marry either of them, I'd much rather marry Francis. And I believe that if anything were to happen to stop B marrying Dick, she'd feel it more than she did before."

CHAPTER XIV

A WEDDING

BEATRIX was married early in September, on a day of golden sunshine, which bathed the house, the church, the garden, and the park, in a glow of calm, soft beauty. It was the prettiest country wedding that could be imagined, and one of the gayest. The house, of course, was full from attic to cellar. Beatrix's relations on both sides converged from all quarters of the United Kingdom, and even from Continental holiday resorts, and there was room for a few intimate friends of the family as well. When every corner of the house had been allocated, and still more people whose claims could not be ignored had to be got in somehow, three or four empty bedrooms at the Vicarage were commandeered, and furnished *ad hoc*. This not providing enough beds, rooms were taken at the inn. More remaining to be arranged for almost at the last minute, Stone Cottage, which had remained empty since Mrs. Walter had left it, was furnished as a dormitory for sundry bachelors. On the night before the wedding between thirty and forty guests, who were staying in the house or its various dependencies, dined there, besides another score or so from Wilborough, and other houses round. The old vaulted refectory of the Abbey, which had remained empty and

unused for generations, was the scene of this lively banquet. It was to be used as a ball-room the next night. "We shall want cheering up when you leave us, darling," her father had said to Beatrix. "Your old Daddy will be the gayest of the gay, but his merriment will be hollow and his laugh a mockery."

Only Caroline knew how much of truth there was in this light statement. He had behaved beautifully throughout the somewhat feverish preparations that had had to be made for a marriage at such short notice. Beatrix had rushed to and from London in a state of happy excitement. When she had been at home she had devoted herself entirely to Dick when he had been there, and when he had not been there she had either talked about him or gone away to brood over him. For when once the barriers had been broken down she had succumbed completely. Caroline smiled to herself sometimes as she thought of the doubts she had felt as to Beatrix marrying without love, or with not enough love. She was made to give herself entirely when she did love, and she now loved Dick with an intensity and completeness that raised him to the seventh heaven of bliss, but seemed to leave little room for any other sort of love. Caroline smiled also, but rather ruefully, when she remembered her father's satisfaction over the place that would be left for him in this new adjustment of his beloved child's affections. She invited confidences from him on the subject, but he gave her none. The complaints and resentments he had expressed over the affair with Lassigny had given

place to a determination to keep all that he must have been feeling about this new affair to himself, except the incidental satisfaction to be gained from it. He was genial and companionable to Dick, and had his reward there in the liking, which was growing into affection, that the younger man had towards him. He was humourous and chaffing with Beatrix, and made no appeals to her for the solace she now almost entirely withheld from him. Perhaps he had his reward there, too, for she must have enjoyed the conviction that she was greatly pleasing him, although she failed to signify the same in the usual manner. The only comment he permitted himself to make to Caroline about the change of wind was when he said that he should hate losing B, but rather looked forward to settling down again after her departure. But he immediately added that it was a great thing to see the dear child so happy, and with so good a chance before her of happiness for the rest of her life. So even Caroline, his confidant, was not to know the sadness with which he was wrestling on his own account, and the new adjustments he was being forced to make, when he had thought that further need for adjustment was to have been spared him.

Caroline, indeed, was having to make a few adjustments on her own account. The distressed and uncertain Beatrix who had come sobbing to her on the night after her engagement, and had come closer to her sister's heart than ever before, was distressed and uncertain no longer, and had no need of her now,

except as a recipient for love's raptures. It was 'Dick, Dick, Dick,' all the time. It spoke well for Dick's quality that Beatrix's family liked him as well at the end of his few weeks' engagement as they had at the beginning. It was he who kept up for them the sense of somebody added to it instead of somebody being taken away. 'Head over ears' as he was, and showed himself to be, he still showed them, whenever Beatrix allowed him the opportunity, that his reception among them added and would further add to the satisfactions of his life. It was not only to be just him and Beatrix, though the bliss to be gained from just him and Beatrix was at present almost beyond his power to grasp. It seemed also to be beyond Beatrix's power to grasp for the time being. She had removed herself from them in spirit, already, and had told Caroline that what she should really like, for the first few years of her marriage, would be for Dick to be ordered to the Pacific, and for herself to inhabit an island to which he could pay occasional visits, leaving her to think about him all alone in the intervals.

Grafton had a moment with her alone just before the ceremony. All the guests were in the church, from which the drone of the organ came across to them, standing in the hall until the clock should strike the hour. The house was empty and strangely quiet. They would have to walk across the few carpeted yards that lay between it and the church between packed masses of neighbourly and intensely sympathetic spectators; but they were waiting just inside

the doorway where they could neither see nor be seen.

"Well, I'm going to give you up, my darling," he said. "I shan't have you alone again before I go. Give me one more kiss all to myself."

She lifted her veil carefully, and held up her sweet, happy face for his kiss. "Mind my hair, Dad," she said.

The church clock struck. "Now we'll go over," he said. "You're not nervous, are you?"

She laughed. "Not a bit," she said. But her hand on his arm trembled a little as they got into the crowded church, and walked up the aisle with all the faces turned or half-turned towards them. That was all the emotion she showed, or had shown. It was all pure untroubled happiness with her.

The reception was held in the drawing-room and morning-room, which opened into one another, and both of them into the formal garden. The broad path which ran along this side of the house had been paved with stone some months before, and the whole space available, indoors and outdoors, permitted of free circulation among the guests.

Lady Mansergh, resplendent in mauve silk, with an enormous picture hat surmounting her red-gold hair, came waddling up to Grafton, her fat good-natured face wreathed in smiles. "Well, it's all over now," she said, "and if you're half as pleased as I am, Mr. Grafton, you're very pleased indeed. What a *sweet* bride! I've never seen one more lovely. If I'd done

what I wanted to I should have broken down and cried. I'm not Dick's mother, but I felt like it. Oh, it's a *perfect* marriage and I wanted it from the very beginning."

"And yet a year ago, you were telling me that I was spoiling the child's life for her because I wouldn't let her marry somebody else," he said with a smile.

"Ah, you knew better than me, after all," she said, tapping him confidentially on the arm. "But you *are* pleased this time, aren't you? Dick says if he hadn't been as much in love with the sweet child as he is, he'd have liked to marry her all the same, because of her family. Now that's what I call a *real* compliment. You *are* a nice family, you know, and I'm sure I don't know how we did without you all here so long. You *are* pleased, aren't you, Mr. Grafton?"

"My dear lady, I'm absolutely delighted," he said. "It's just the sort of marriage I should like for all my girls; and Dick is one of the best fellows that ever stepped."

Old Sir Alexander also had a word of satisfaction to express. "Always wanted a daughter," he said, "but never expected to get such a pretty one. Lucky fellow, Dick! Arranged for another wedding present for them this morning, Grafton. Given Dick Manor Farm. Want 'em to make their home there, and have the girl near us when she can't be with Dick. Won't have to wait long, I dare say, before they come in for the lot; but it'll be a few years yet if this infernal lumbago doesn't take me."

"Manor Farm! That's the old house right the other end of your property, isn't it?"

"Yes, it's a pity it isn't this end. Then we could have had her between us. Still, it's one of the prettiest houses I've got, and I'm going to put it back to what it was before it was turned into a farmhouse, and make it all nice for 'em. I've told the child, and she's delighted. She knows how to play the daughter, Grafton. She'll make a lot of difference to me in my old age, bless her!"

Grafton had already been bombarded with congratulations from his own and his wife's relations, but they were not over yet, nor would be until the guests had all departed. Lady Grafton, who had remonstrated with him about his refusal to accept Lassigny as the desired husband for Beatrix, had admitted handsomely that this was a far more satisfactory marriage for her, but was never tired of hearing him say so. She came up to him with a glass of champagne in one hand and a piece of wedding cake in the other.

"Well, my dear George," she said. "Here's the first of them gone. I hope you're as pleased about it as you ought to be. You won't like losing the child, but you couldn't expect to keep her with you always, and she's married just the right sort of man."

"Wonderful powers of observation you have, Mary," he said. "I shouldn't like to disappoint you in any way, and I'm glad you're pleased with me."

"Ah now you're being sarcastic, but I'm sure I don't know what for. I'll behave handsomely to you,

and admit that you turned out to be right a year ago, and all the rest of us turned out to be wrong, including B herself, apparently. I've never seen a girl more devoted to the man she's going to marry. Perfectly beautiful, I call it. She hasn't got a thought for anybody else. She'll make him a splendid wife, and I must say you deserve a great deal of credit for the way in which you've brought up *all* your girls. They have learnt to be everything to you, and I expect you've wanted a good deal of humouring, as all men do, though it doesn't show on the surface. If they have been able to manage you so well, they'll know how to manage their husbands, which most of us have to learn after we're married to them. I'm sure the trouble I had first of all with my dear old James, before I got into his ways—"

"Or he got into yours," suggested Grafton.

She allowed herself to be diverted. "Now, George," she said, "that's a thoroughly man's speech. *Is* James happy or is he not?"

"The Bank Rate is very satisfactory at present," said Grafton. "I think both James and I are as happy as we can expect to be."

Lady Handsworth also admitted handsomely that his opposition to Lassigny had borne good fruit. "This is a more satisfactory marriage than that would have been, even if M. de Lassigny had been everything you could have wished him to be," she said. "I am glad it has come about so quickly, and so naturally, George. I did say to you, I remember, that her

first love meant so much to a girl that if she were disappointed in it no other love could be quite the same to her. But you seem to have judged more rightly than I even over that, which is more of a woman's question than a man's. I suppose it is because you have always had such sympathy with your girls. I confess that I should never have expected to come to Beatrix's wedding within a few months and find her so entirely cured of that other affair. She *was* very deeply in love, I know, and in the nicest sweetest sort of way; but she seems still more deeply in love now."

"Well, you see she's found the right fellow," said Grafton. "He's worth what she gives him. The other fellow wasn't; but I don't think she'd really given him everything; she only thought she had."

"You're a wise man, George. Women have much more to give to those they love than they have any idea of themselves at first. But men don't usually know that. And only the best sort of men bring it out. B is a darling, but it would make a great deal of difference whom she married. I do think now that with Lassigny she would just have developed as a charming delightful woman, but rather of the butterfly order—even if everything had gone right with their married life. But I think Dick will make her. She will show very fine qualities by and bye. He will bring them out."

"I hope he will," said Grafton.

The Bishop, who had performed the ceremony, was standing in a little group with his wife and Prescott

and Viola. "Well, my dear friend," he said, "you've provided one of the happiest weddings I've ever taken part in, and I think I may say one of the very sweetest and prettiest of brides."

"What I like about all your girls, Mr. Grafton," said the Bishop's wife, "is that there's not an ounce of nonsense in them anywhere. They show all their feelings, and they fortunately never have any feelings that they would want to hide."

"That's a very handsome tribute," said Grafton. "But I think it's deserved."

"I've never seen anybody look happier than the little bride," she went on. "If all the marriages you have solemnised, my dear, bid fair to turn out so satisfactorily as this one—!"

"Yes," said the Bishop. "Marriage is a blessed state where there's complete love and trust. I think one could say that neither of these two would be complete without it."

"Or without one another," said Viola. "Gerry, dear, I thought we were the most satisfactory couple you could find anywhere, but Dick and B have advantages over us. He is not so harum-scarum as you are, and she is much prettier and nicer than I am."

"Gentle fisher-maiden," sang Prescott. "But she's a sweet thing, and deserves all the happiness she can get. I think she's found the right man to give it her too. His Lordship and I did a very good thing when we spliced them up. I'm all for making everybody happy."

Jimmy Beckley had a word or two of wisdom to impart on the subject of the marriage. He would have liked to impart them to Beatrix herself, but found it impossible, as he had rather feared, to get her apart; so he asked Barbara to come for a stroll with him, and she consented, having a fair idea of what the invitation portended, and expecting to draw amusement from it.

"You know," said Jimmy, when they were out of earshot of the crowd, "a wedding of this sort is a jolly moving thing. I wouldn't say that to everybody, because the general idea is to keep grinning all the time, and advise the young couple to keep clear of squalls. But I believe you can see further into things than most people, Barbara, though I shouldn't have said it of you a year ago."

"I'm glad you've noticed the change in me," said Barbara, with suspicious humility. "Of course I was a child a year ago; now I'm a woman, and better company for people of intelligence."

"That's quite true," said Jimmy. "I can talk to you now about things I should never have thought of mentioning to you last year. I can tell you, Barbara, that this marriage of B's has made me see a good many things in a different light. When you see a girl like that—bright and taking and pretty—pledging herself to a man for life—and doing it before an old Bishop of course makes it all the more jolly—it makes you think that a lot of the business that's talked about love—well, the Johnnies who talk about it don't know

as much as they think. That's how it struck me in the church just now, 'specially when the old bird spouted that bit about for richer and poorer, and in sickness and in health and all that. I don't know whether you felt something of the same. I expect you did. You've got a heart; I know that, though everybody might not twig it."

"Thank you, Jimmy," said Barbara. "Yes, I felt much the same as you say you did. It made me think that there was no sense in wasting yourself over a lot of idle fancies. Much better wait till exactly the right man comes along, and give him everything."

"H'm! Well!" said Jimmy, evidently somewhat at a loss. "But *you* haven't had much time for idle fancies."

"Oh, I don't know," said Barbara. "I wouldn't tell it to everybody, but I know it's safe with you. You understand these things. I— No, I can't after all. Please forget what I said, Jimmy. There is nobody; nobody at all; and if there were, you're the last person I should confess it to."

"My dear child," said Jimmy, "you've said what you have said, and I'm very glad you've said it to me. There's nothing to be ashamed of. I suppose what you mean is that you've taken a fancy to some fellow and don't like to acknowledge it because you think it mayn't be returned."

"Oh, I know it isn't," said Barbara.

"Well, I shouldn't be so sure of that if I were you," said Jimmy. "You're young, and you don't know

men. You see *them* taking fancies to people, but perhaps after all there isn't much in it. This fellow may be thinking a great deal about you all the time; perhaps not liking to show it himself because you haven't given him any encouragement."

"Oh, no. I know he can't possibly care for me at all. Besides, it's all over now. I *was* rather weak, but I'm not any more."

"If this chap let you see that he was thinking about you, and was very glad to know that you were thinking about him in that way, I suppose it wouldn't be over, would it?"

"I think so, but I couldn't be certain till I got back."

"Got back! What do you mean? Got back where?"

"Why, to Paris. You see, I've had six weeks to get over it."

Jimmy stopped and looked at her sternly. "Do you mean to say, Barbara, that you've fallen in love with some ass of a fellow in Paris?" he asked.

"Oh, he wasn't an ass, Jimmy. He was a splendid-looking man. He was one of the Gardes Municipales who was on duty at the Opéra. I saw him three times. Before that it was one of the clergy at the English Church. Now I've begun I may as well tell you everything. Before that there was a driver of a *fiacre* who used to stand in the Place Saint Sulpice, but he was much too old—about sixty-five, I should think, and that didn't last long. Before that—oh, but I can't tell you any more. I'm glad I've made a clean breast of

it, though. *You* understand it all, I know, and can make allowances."

"I can't make allowances for that sort of rotten business," said Jimmy stiffly. "You're the last girl I should have thought would have mucked about like that. If that's the way you behave yourself in Paris, I don't think you ought to be allowed to go back there."

"I don't suppose I should be allowed, if Dad knew. Of course, as I told you, it's all over now; but I don't know what will happen when I get back to Paris. I may see somebody else, and not be able to help myself. There's rather a handsome violin teacher who comes to teach one of the girls—but I mustn't give away other people's secrets, and she has left now. I shall be the only one to learn the violin next term."

"You don't play the violin."

"I asked Dad if I might, and he said I could."

"Barbara!" Jimmy stopped in the path again, with the evident intention of expressing himself with weight and fervour. But he had only got out the sentence. "You will *not* learn the violin next term," when Young George arrived on the scene.

"What's up?" he asked. "You look as if you were having a row."

"Jimmy objects to my learning the violin," said Barbara. "I'm sure I don't know why."

"You know very well why," said Jimmy. "Do you wish me to tell George the reason why I object?"

"Yes, if you've got one."

"She has taken a fancy to the violin teacher," said Jimmy. "She actually acknowledges it, and says—"

"Why shouldn't I acknowledge it?" interrupted Barbara. "She's a very clever teacher, and took the First Prize at the Conservatoire."

"You can't get out of it like that," said Jimmy hotly. "If there's a woman there's a man too. You said so. And what about the cab-driver, and the bobby, and the curate? It's a good deal too serious for me to keep it to myself, and I shall tell George everything you told me."

"Yes, you tell him all about it, dear," said Barbara. "I can't stay any longer. I must go to B. Good-bye, little man."

The time came for Beatrix to go off. A great crowd had collected in the hall, through which she made her way laughing, and round the carriage that was to take her to the station. Before her husband handed her into it she threw her arm round her father's neck. "Good-bye, my precious old Daddy," she said. "I'll write to you the very first thing."

CHAPTER XV

AN ACCIDENT

It was a wild wet day in late October. A terrific gale had swept over the country the night before, and strewn the coasts of England with wreckage. It had done great damage at Abington, and when Caroline looked out of her bedroom window in the morning she saw evidence of it in great trees lying prone here and there in the park, and the drift of leaves and branches scattered everywhere. The wind was still raging, though it had abated some of its fury, and even as she looked she saw a high elm that had towered above the beeches with which the slopes of the park were mostly planted come crashing to the earth.

After breakfast she went out to see what damage had been done. The wind was blowing over the house to the front, and when she got out of its shelter she was seized as if in the grip of something tangible, and held for a moment struggling. She laughed and went on, enjoying it, but had to hold on to her hat to prevent its being wrenched off her head; and her thick tweed skirt was blown all about her. In her young strength and resiliency she seemed as much at home in this wild weather as in days of blue sky and soft airs. She was no fair-weather girl, and the rain which drove against her fretted her as little as the wind.

As she made her way across the park she saw the figure of a man making his way towards the spot where the most havoc had been done, and recognised it for that of Maurice Bradby. He saw her and came towards her. When they met they laughed at one another. "Isn't it glorious?" she said. "I thought you'd be out to enjoy it."

Her face was wet with the rain. Her hair, where it showed under her close-fitting felt hat, was pearly with it. She had never looked more lovely, to him, than then as she smiled up to him. His rugged, rather unkempt strength also showed to advantage in this battle of the elements. He had gained the country look, which is not affected by chances of weather, but shows a spirit attuneable to expressions of all nature's moods.

"I've come out to see what damage has been done," he said; and they went on together.

In the shelter of the trees progression was easier, but the gale still roared and shrieked above them, and twigs and small branches were being torn off and falling all about. Once a branch of considerable size cracked and fell within a few yards of them, and Bradby looked anxiously at her, and suggested that it would be safer in the open. But he was keen on the work he had come out for, and she was interested in it too. So they went on.

He was noting the trees that had fallen and measuring them with his eye for their timber. He seemed to her to be doing it with a wonderful sureness and

competence, as he did everything in connection with his work, and she tested herself as to her own understanding of the matter in hand, and received congratulations from him on her eye for timber. This pleased her. It was more interesting, doing things, than just walking and talking, and to do them with him was to do them with some one who could teach her a lot of what she liked knowing about. And she liked helping him, too. He had a master mind in all that had to do with the commodities of nature; she had long since come to recognise that. In all outward aspects her inferior, here he was on a plane which put her at his feet, and he exercised his knowledge with a quiet assurance that made his mastery evident. It was worth while to work with him; and to gain his commendation brought a thrill.

They went to where the great elm had fallen. It was the tallest of a group of three standing among the beeches on the highest point to be seen from the Abbey. It had been a magnificent tree, but had passed its age of healthy growth, and the amount of sound timber to be reckoned with was difficult to gauge. They interested themselves deeply in it, while the gale, which seemed to have increased in violence again, raged all about them.

They were standing by the uprooted bole, wondering at the exposed roots, which seemed to have so little to anchor such a giant to the earth, when suddenly Bradby seized Caroline and threw her violently into the hollow from which the tree had been uprooted.

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She fell and lay in a puddle of water, and was instantly overwhelmed by the branches and twigs of a great bough, some of which whipped her in the face, drawing blood, and one more solid hit her heavily on the arm and drove it into her side.

When she had recovered a little from the fright and shock she wriggled herself free from it. If it had been set ever so little more at an angle it must have crushed her body, for the bough that had been torn from one of the elms still standing was of great size and weight, and this was one of its biggest branches.

She raised herself with difficulty through the mass that was hemming her in, and called to Bradby. But there was no answer; only the wind and the driving rain.

With her heart in her mouth she clambered out of the hollow and then saw him lying half in and half out of it, with his face white and dead, and his body underneath the heavy branch that had struck her down.

She found herself struggling with all her might to lift the weight from him, and then came suddenly to herself and ran as fast as she could down the hill to get help. Her face was bruised and bleeding, and her arm hung by her side useless, though she knew that it was not broken. She was hurt, too, where it had been pressed into her body, and every breath she drew was a sharp twinge. But she ran the whole way to the house, and managed to give clear and quick instructions to the men she found in the stables. She would

have gone up with them, but Miss Waterhouse, who had seen her running across the park, came out and insisted upon her coming in. When she got indoors she collapsed, for she was rather badly hurt.

Bradby was hurt very seriously. He had seen the bough crack and begin to fall, directly towards where they were standing. Caroline was standing with her back towards it. He might have got out of the way himself, but there would have been no time to warn her, or even drag her out of danger. To throw her into the hollow was the only chance, and the bough caught him before he could jump in after her. The fallen trunk fortunately took the weight of the great bough, which if it had fallen to the ground must have killed them both. But the branch, an elbow of which had crushed Caroline, had struck Bradby down. It had broken both his thighs, and he had ribs broken besides, and internal injury which made his life hang in the balance for as long as Caroline took to recover from her lesser hurt.

He was said to be just out of danger when she was well enough to leave her room, and in two days, when she had practically recovered and could go out again, he was said to be going to get quite well, though he would have to lie up for many weeks yet.

He had been moved down to the Abbey, and was installed there with a couple of nurses, one of whom was able to leave him in a week. When Caroline first saw him he had altered so as to give her a shock of dismay. He was thin and gaunt and pale, but his

great dark eyes stood out of his face in such a way as to bring out its essential refinement. The immaturity of his features seemed to have been wiped out; he was almost handsome, with his shock of dark hair spread over his pillow, and his long, pale, thin face with the fine eyes.

His mother was with him—a gentle sweet-faced woman, with the same beautiful eyes, but no other resemblance to this ugly duckling of a son. He must have inherited his strength and ruggedness from his father, of whom a photograph stood on his mantelpiece. There were photographs of his brothers and sisters too—good-looking men and girls, more like their mother than he was. His father had come when he was at his worst, but had gone back to his parish, and Caroline had not seen him.

Caroline knew he had saved her life, but found herself unable to say so, or to thank him. And she knew that he didn't want her to. They said very little at her first visit, but it was plain what healing it brought him.

She told Mrs. Bradby what he had done. "It was his quickness that saved me," she said, "and not thinking about himself. Very few people would have been able to think of what to do, and do it, in that fraction of time. The instinct *must* have been to get out of the way."

His mother must have known his secret. An instinct stronger than that of self-preservation had been at work, and Caroline owed her life to it, and he his injuries.

She looked rather sadly at the beautiful girl sitting with her. They were in the Long Gallery, in which all the circumstances of this kindly hospitable family were expressed. She had been taken in just as if she belonged to all the wealth and ease, and the wide relationships, herself, and her son was being treated as if he were of it too. But his lot, and hers, were cast in very different places from that of the people who inhabited rooms of this sort, and had the relationships indicated by the photographs that were set about. They were of two different worlds—the world of work and the world of wealth, which never entirely coalesce, though contact is formed here and there between them.

She looked at Caroline and saw her more in the light of the state of life to which she belonged than in that of her essential character. It was the first time that they had met, and though she was strongly attracted to her she had not yet gauged her fine true spirit. It was natural that she should be affected by her outward appearance, which betokened her birth and her station, and seemed to put her altogether out of reach of a young man who had enjoyed none of the advantages of wealth, and had none of the elasticity which enables some to climb up from rungs of the social ladder a good deal lower than that from which he had started.

But before she left Abington, which she did two days after she first saw Caroline, she came to look at her son with new eyes, and it was Caroline who opened them for her.

It is not every mother who loves her ugly duckling better than the handsome ones. Mrs. Bradby took more pride in her other sons than in Maurice, who, until he had made his new start at Abington, had been looked on in his home as something of a failure. Even now, though his new start had seemed to promise success, neither his father nor mother had taken it as anything more than a fortunate finding of the right path for him. There was indeed no more to be seen in it than that. Land Agency is hardly a career in itself. At the best he would live the life that suited him, and gain in time a situation which would enable him to marry. He could never expect more than a modest income and a modest home. He would bring satisfaction to his parents if he worked up to that, but not pride, as their other sons were in the way of doing.

But this beautiful, sweet, clever girl saw a great deal beneath the not very attractive exterior. He might do nothing in the world that would be counted as success. He was hardly in the way of doing anything, and yet she spoke of what he was doing as if it went much deeper than the work in which he was spending his days, and by which he was about to earn his living. He was in his right place in the world, and in tune with big things. This was more than to make the sort of success that his brothers might make in their several careers. If his mother did not think it was more, she at least saw that Maurice was not to be judged by the standards applied to them,

and her heart went out to the girl who had found more in him than she had.

It may be supposed that she was on the alert for any sign that Caroline was attracted towards her son in the way that she had divined he was towards her. She was not sure, at the end of her visit that she wasn't; but she was sure that if she was she didn't know it yet, or she would not have spoken of him with that unfettered admiration for his fine qualities. It was natural that she should show warmth of feeling towards him, when he was lying battered and broken by having saved her from the same or from worse injury; but that warmth also was expressed frankly and without reserve. His mother thought, rather sadly, that if Caroline had thought of him as of a young man with whom it was possible to fall in love, she wouldn't have praised him so freely. She was what her surroundings had made her; he was something quite different. She would accept the difference as putting a barrier between them, and from behind that barrier she could give him her liking and admiration and understanding.

So it seemed to Mrs. Bradby, as she drove away from the Abbey, with gratitude for all that she had received there warm in her heart. She had come to see in Caroline, as Caroline saw in Maurice, something deeper than what was shown on the surface, something deeper even than the kindness and goodness that was there for all to see. If Maurice had been older, more sure of himself, it seemed to her in her

new view of him that he might have aspired to this girl, in spite of the differences between them. She would not think that they would matter; she was too fine to base herself upon the accidents of her upbringing. She would take a man for what he was, not for his outward seeming. But Maurice was still immature; he would not himself think that he had enough to offer a girl such as Caroline, nor be able to impress her to step out of the conventions that hemmed her round.

It was just as well. Nothing but trouble, it seemed to her, could come from a love declared and returned. Maurice had done so well that he was to be paid as Sub-Agent to the Abington property from the beginning of the year. Mr. Grafton, she knew, had arranged that, who was always so kind. But his kindness could hardly be expected to stand the test of giving his daughter to a young man who would be making barely enough money to keep himself, and was quite outside the circle in which marriages were formed for her and her like. It was, perhaps, something of a comfort to be convinced that Maurice, whatever he might feel towards Caroline, would be too diffident to bring on that complication, and that she would not lend herself to it.

But she had reckoned without the impulsions of youth, of dependence upon one side and of gratitude and pity on the other.

Maurice had been moved on to a sofa by the open window, and Caroline was sitting by his side talking

to him, as she had sat and talked for days past. By and bye—she never afterwards remembered quite how—her hand was lying in his, and they were looking into one another's eyes, with a meaning infinitely tender and trustful. There was nobody in the world but their two selves, and they both knew it, without any necessity for words. Caroline's time had come. She had not known it until that moment, but she knew it now without the shadow of a doubt, and accepted it with complete surrender.

CHAPTER XVI

MAURICE

GRAFTON had gone up to London on Monday morning, and would not be back until Friday evening. Caroline wrote to him on Tuesday morning. Maurice also wrote to him. There was no reply to either of the letters. Caroline had told him that she should tell no one else until she heard from him, or saw him.

She motored to the station to meet him. Her heart was heavy, but beneath her dread of what was coming was a deep calm and assurance. There were to have been guests at the Abbey over the week-end, but a telegram had been received to say that they had been put off. That was all that she had heard from her father, though when he had been away for the whole working week he had always written to her at least once.

He gave her his usual greeting when he got out of the train—"Well, my darling!" and kissed her. The kiss was, if anything, warmer than usual, and she felt an immense lift of love and gratitude towards him. If he had brought himself to accept it! She had hardly dared to hope for that.

He had brought some cases down, and she stood with her arm in his while he gave instructions about them. Then they got into the car and drove off.

"I didn't write, darling," he said immediately, "be-

cause it wanted a lot of thinking about, and some getting used to. It was quite a surprise to me. You say it was to you, too. Are you quite sure about it?"

"Yes, Dad, quite sure," she said softly, her arm still in his.

"Well, I knew you must be. I came to see that. Whatever I thought about it myself, it was for you to decide, and you weren't likely to have made a mistake, or to have gone into it lightly. I trust you absolutely, darling. I trust you in some things more than I do myself. If it's what you want, you must be right to want it. You'll have no trouble with me."

She broke down and cried on his shoulder. The strain on her had been greater than she had known, and its entire removal unbalanced her for the moment. Her tears did not last long. "You've made me so happy," she said. "I don't know why I'm crying. I ought to be laughing."

"Dearest child!" he said tenderly. "You've been fearing that I should make a fuss, eh? Well, there's going to be a bit of a fuss, you know, Aunt Katharine and Aunt Mary, and all the rest of them. They won't understand it all."

"Do you understand it all, Dad?" she asked. "Is that why you're so sweet about it?"

"Perhaps I don't understand it all," he said, "though I've taken a lot of trouble about it. You won't expect me to shirk the difficulties. You'll have to answer up, won't you? *They* won't like it, and

they'll say so. It will be for your sake they'll make objections, and think they are right in doing it. You'll have to remember that. But they're not—either of them—what you might call worldly, at heart. If you're right you'll be able to make them see it."

"I shan't mind anything if you're on my side, darling Dad. I hoped you would be when I had seen you, but I didn't think you'd bring me such comfort as you have, just at first. It makes me love you more than ever, because you understand the best things in me."

There was a pause before he said: "Tell me about it, darling. We needn't talk about what the world will see, and criticise. You must have faced that. And—"

"Perhaps it would be better," she said, "if I tell you how I have faced it, so as to get it out of the way, between you and me, Dad. We have talked about marriage together, and I know what your views are. Mine were much the same, before I knew I loved Maurice. I suppose that was why I didn't know that I did love him. Until it came to me, I shouldn't have thought of marrying anybody that Aunt Katharine and Aunt Mary wouldn't think it suitable that I should marry—somebody with an established position, who had lived in the world that they belong to. I think even if I had found myself to have fallen in love—"

She hesitated. "Ah, that's the important thing," he said, and she knew that he understood her, and went on, with a pressure on the arm she was holding. "Yes,

even if I had fallen in love—unless there was something deeper—I shouldn't have thought it right, and should have tried to get over it."

He kissed her, and laughed. "I think I'm rather a clever fellow," he said. "I've had to work it out all by myself, and I've worked it out right. You see, I know you, my Cara. I don't know him yet, though. So it wasn't easy."

She pressed closer to him. "It's lovely to feel one is so much trusted," she said. "But you were right to trust me, darling. No, I know it couldn't have been easy. I've had to do some thinking myself, so as to see how you'd take it. I knew you'd be dear and kind, but I couldn't expect you to see Maurice as I see him, now that I love him. *He* thinks, you know, that I'm much above him. I'm not, in anything that matters. But in all the things that the world looks at—. That's what we're up against, isn't it, Dad?"

"We'll be up against it together, darling, and if I'm with you the others won't matter much. But it's true, you know, that I don't see him as you do, yet. You've got to help me."

"I know. Well, darling, you've seen I have changed since we came to live here. When we had that ride, to breakfast with Mollie, we talked about it. You thought I was cutting myself off from something that was worth having. I wasn't quite sure that I wasn't, and I enquired into myself afterwards."

"What did you discover? It's very important. You *will* cut yourself off."

"I discovered that I really didn't want any of it; not to make it matter. My happiness is in the quietest things I do, not in the other things. Even our big beautiful house, and the garden, and the way we live—that counted for a lot when we first came to live in the country. But it's not what counts most now. It's the country itself—nature, I suppose. I'm at home with it. There's something in me that responds. Well, Maurice is like that too; even more than I am, because his life has been simpler than mine. He is really big, Dad; big and simple and direct. There's been nothing to complicate his purpose. I've felt it about him all along. Now I love him, I know what it is that has brought me to him. I can look up to him, and I do."

They went up together to Maurice's room. He was on the sofa, propped up now against cushions, and soon to be ready to be wheeled about.

"Well, my boy!" said Grafton, as he shook hands with him.

"Dad is on our side, Maurice," said Caroline.

A look of intense happiness came into his face, and tears sprang to his eyes; for he was still weak, and the relief brought to him was overpowering.

Grafton sat down by the sofa. "She has told me all about it," he said. "If it's what she wants, it's what I want for her."

As he spoke he searched the young man's face, to see, if he could, what there was in him that he hadn't seen already, but she had seen to such surprising

effect. He caught a glimpse of it. It was a strong face. The diffidence that had been perhaps the chief note of this young man's behaviour towards them all had been based upon his youth and inexperience. They had represented to him a side of life in which he had not been, and probably never would be, at home. But it was the conventional side of life. In the big, basic things he would not show diffidence. And he would grow into his man's good strength.

He had grown already. He looked the older man straight in the face as he said: "I've done nothing to deserve her yet. But if you'll give her to me I will."

Worthing came to dine that evening. Grafton was to tell him about it when they were alone together after dinner. Miss Waterhouse, only, had been told so far. She had shown no surprise, but had said very little. Grafton was not sure whether she approved or not, but knew that she would express herself to him by and bye, in her quiet way that was full of wisdom.

Worthing had been up to see Maurice before dinner. He was rather quieter than usual until he and his host were left alone together. When Caroline and Miss Waterhouse had gone out of the room, he said at once: "Grafton, I've got to get something off my chest, and I may as well do it at once. I think the sooner young Bradby is moved out of here the better."

Grafton laughed, rather ruefully. "You should have said that a fortnight ago," he said. "It's too late now, James."

Worthing stared at him open-mouthed. "You don't mean to say—!"

"They've fallen in love with one another. She's as deep in it as he is."

Worthing struggled with his consternation. "But—but—but—" was all he could say, and each 'but' marked a question to which he wanted an answer.

"What do you see in the boy, James?" asked Grafton. "He's been living with you for over a year now. You must know him as well as anybody."

Worthing found his voice. "What do I see in him?" he said. "I don't see a husband for Caroline in him. I call it an infernal piece of impudence. Surely you're not going to allow it! Why, he's hardly begun his work yet. He couldn't expect to marry anybody, for years to come. And a girl like Caroline! Good Lord! What's the world coming to?"

He seemed greatly disturbed. "I feel as if I was to blame, in bringing him here," he said. "But I never thought—"

"Well, it's natural that you should take that view, at first. I took it myself when I first had their letters. It was about the biggest startler I've ever had. But you know Caroline, James. She loves him. If you can find the answer to the riddle why she loves him, for yourself—!"

"That's not very difficult. He saved her life, and nearly lost his own in doing it. She's been looking after him. Women are like that, and young girls

especially. You don't have to know much about them to see that; there are thousands of instances."

"That's what it will look like to everybody, I know. But it wouldn't be enough for Caroline."

"Caroline's one of the best girls that ever stepped. All your girls are; they're quite out of the common. But human nature works in them just the same as in anybody else. Why, you've seen it yourself, in Beatrix. She fell in love with a wrong 'un. You stopped that; and now she's got the right man. Supposing *she'd* married the first fellow she fell in love with!"

"You say I stopped it. I've asked myself how much I had to do with stopping it. I got it put off. If he hadn't—"

"Well, then, you ought to get this put off—at least. Bradby is a good enough fellow in his own class, but his class isn't Caroline's. That's plain enough! I can't understand your thinking about it all. There isn't a soul in the world who wouldn't think you were justified in stopping it—taking her away, or something; or telling me to clear him out. I'd do it like a shot."

"It wouldn't make any difference. I've come to see that. I love my little B, but she isn't Caroline. *She* might have fallen in love—she actually did—with a man who wasn't fit for her to marry. Caroline never would."

"Beatrix would never have fallen in love with Bradby."

"I know she wouldn't. She wouldn't have seen be-

low the surface. Caroline does, and she finds something there that I confess I haven't been able to see hitherto. That's why I asked you at the beginning what you saw in him. Get rid of all the side issues. He's young; he isn't in a position to marry; he doesn't belong to our sort of people. What is he beneath all that? Or, if you like, what is he going to grow into?"

"He's A1 at his work. I've never denied that. He'll get a good job by and bye, and be worth it; but not for a good many years yet."

"That is one of the side issues. Caroline wouldn't love him because he was likely to get a good job. What is he in himself? Come now, James, you're a man of some perception, and he has lived with you for over a year."

"What is he in himself?" Worthing frowned, with the effort to direct his thoughts into the channels required of them. "You want me to give you excuses for accepting him," he said.

"Not excuses; reasons. I'll tell you how Caroline sees him. Her words struck me. She said he was big and simple and direct."

This was rather beyond Worthing. "He's a good fellow," he said. "He's not always thinking about himself; a nice fellow to live with. Whatever he does he does as well as he can do it. Is that what she means by being direct? He's simple enough, if that's a good quality. I'm not sure that it is. Fellows of our age can say we've hit upon the right sort of life and don't

want anything beyond it, but I think a young fellow ought to have some ambition. I've never seen any in him. I doubt if he'd ever move to get himself on; he'd just do his work wherever he was. I don't know what she means by his being big. He's in his right place on the land."

"That's what she does mean, I think. He's so much in his right place, where most people aren't quite. And the land is big. He's in tune with it. I think that's how she expressed it. It's a bit beyond anything I could have got hold of myself, but it isn't beyond me to take in her view, believing in her as I do. She's big herself, you know, James. And she's simple and direct too. She has found herself, living here in the country. Eighteen months ago she wouldn't have fallen in love with Bradby, any more than B would. She's been getting away from the sort of life she was brought up to all the time. I've known that."

"But do you want that? It means she's getting away from you. I should have thought that was the last thing you'd have wanted."

"Damn it, man! Can't you see into things a bit? How much do you think I should be likely to want a marriage of this sort for a daughter of mine, if it were left to me? I was absolutely bowled over by it. I'll say that, just once to you, and get it out of the way. I'll say it to nobody else, and I won't let Caroline know it if I can possibly help it. Supposing I stood out! What should I stand out on? On everything that she sees as plainly as I do, but rejects for herself. And

what she sees and accepts as all important for her, and for the best part of her, she'd find me incapable of accepting. What could part us more than that? She's made up her mind, and she's sure she's right. She won't change; it would be a come down for her to take the view of it all that strikes you and me. I'm what I am, and what my life has made me. I can't help this being a grievous disappointment to me. I want all sorts of things for her that I've a right to want for my daughter. But if *she* doesn't want them—if she doesn't think they're the best things—!”

“She's bound to miss all she's been brought up to.”

“If I thought she would I might stick out, for her sake. It wouldn't bring *me* much consolation to stick out. I should only be dividing myself from her, as I did for a time from B. I don't want that again. I've learnt something. I stuck out against that fellow because I felt right through me that he wasn't right in himself, for B. If I stood out against Bradby, it would be because he wasn't a match for Caroline in money and position and all that sort of thing. I'm not going to base myself on all that, and show myself incapable of sharing her bigger ideals. And what would be the good? It would hurt her damnably to know that I couldn't stand beside her on that plane; but she'd never come down to mine.”

Worthing showed himself impressed. “If you think of her like that!” he said.

“Well, isn't it the right way to think about her? There are some people in the world whom you can

trust never to go wrong. She's one of them. Her mother was another. If her mother had been alive, she'd have backed her up. I've tried my best to stand for what she would have done towards our children, but a man can only make a clumsy job of that at his best. Still, where I see it, I'm going to take her line rather than my own. I'd have trusted her; and I trust Caroline."

Worthing was silent for a time. Then he said: "Well, I hope you're right about it. I can't say it looks anything but odd to me. I don't think you can care about it much yourself, either. You must have had a difficult time bringing yourself to your present way of thinking. I can see that. It does you a lot of credit."

Grafton sat silent too, looking down. Presently he said, as if summing it all up: "I trust Caroline. If I don't see it as she does, it's because my ideas aren't likely to be as right as hers. But for my own sake, and hers too, I shall try to see it as she does. And I shall stand between her and her relations. I shan't say as much to any of them as I have to you. We'd better go up to them, I think. Don't let him see what you think about it, more than you can help. Make the best of him."

Grafton had a talk with Maurice alone the next morning. He had never found it easy to talk to him, except where it was a question of the things he knew about. He had as little of the art of general conversation as a young man of his age very well could have,

and his diffidence had made him even rather tiresome as a companion.

But there was none in the way he spoke now. He had gained Caroline's love, which made him feel himself a king among men, though in desert still far beneath her. He was full of gratitude for the gift of her love, and he was grateful too to her father for his acceptance of him as her lover.

"I know what a lot there is against me," he said quietly, "that you are bound to take into account. But although she's so much above me in every way, we love the same things, and I can give her something that another man might not. I've found out that I can make her happy. That's the most wonderful discovery I've ever made. I hope you'll trust me to do it."

"My dear boy," Grafton said, "I've got to trust you. She does. It's all I want of you, that you should make her happy, all her life. I've made her happy up till now. But a father can't complete his daughter's life, however much he loves her. Only a husband can do that. She believes you're the one man in the world who can give her all she wants, and because she believes it, I'm bound to believe it too. Tell me the course of life you have in your mind for yourselves. I know you've talked it over together, but I told her I'd rather have it from you. I want to get into complete sympathy with you as well as with her."

"I know it must be difficult for you, Mr. Grafton," the boy said. "We are both very grateful to you for

the way you have treated me. I didn't expect you'd be so kind about it. She said you would be, but I think I can see more clearly than she does what a difference there is between us. In the way you'd look at it, I think I see it just as clearly as you do."

"Well, I'm glad you've said that, Maurice. I suppose a father is apt to think about the material side of marriage for his daughters more than the other. I think he's right to do it, because with the experience he has reached he knows well enough that the material side of a marriage is a lot more important than two young people who have fallen in love with one another are likely to see for themselves. It mustn't be left out of account with you two. That's why I want to know what your ideas are—as to the way you've planned it out for yourselves."

"We look at it like this," he answered at once. "A very simple life, in the country, will give both of us what we most want. It's easy enough for me, because it's more than I've ever had. Even the way I live with Mr. Worthing, and coming here, and going to other houses like this, is more than I've had. I should expect to be able to get to that by what I can earn, by and bye, but of course it's much less than Caroline has been used to. I've thought about it a great deal, and tried to take into account everything that she would be losing by marrying me—to see whether she ought not to lose any of it."

"Well, what do you think she will be losing?"

"The biggest thing, which would trouble me greatly

if I thought she would lose it because of me, would be the way you and her own family would look upon her. If it wouldn't make any difference——"

"Well, it won't make any difference to me. I've assured you of that already."

"I'm rather afraid of how Beatrix will take it."

"Beatrix won't like it, Maurice. We'd better look it all in the face. I don't know how her life will turn out, but it will never be so free of the world as Caroline's will. She isn't built on the same lines, and they won't come together on the deepest things in Caroline's life. She won't understand them. But they love one another, and they'll go on loving one another."

"Yes, I think so. It was you I thought most about. Then her other relations, and all the people she has lived among, and I haven't. She will be cut off from them. Not entirely, where they are real friends; but she will no longer be living their life, and I'm not fitted to live it. She won't be able to see so much even of those who would want her, and she would like to see. She won't be able to pay many visits, or go much to London. She will miss all the clever interesting people she has constantly met, and being in the world, and part of it, as she has been."

Grafton laughed. "She'll have told you that she has already reconciled herself to not living much in the world," he said.

"Yes, she has. But I had to ask myself for her whether she wouldn't miss it more than she thinks. She has a great deal of it still—here. She wouldn't

have nearly so much. And of course all that it means living in a house like this she would lose,—what she has grown used to, and doesn't think about, because she has always had it. I can see how different her life would be."

"I think you've faced it all pretty straight, Maurice, except that she'll lose consideration in the world. How does that strike you?"

He hesitated a moment. "I don't think it matters," he said.

"Perhaps it doesn't. But why don't you think it matters?"

"Because nothing that she will be if she marries me will be less than what she has been. Everybody whose opinion she would value would know that."

"Well, I think you've got that right too. And as for all the rest—there's a certain way of living that one wouldn't like to see one's daughter fall below; but it doesn't depend upon big houses, or a lot of money. There's no reason why she shouldn't have it. I do think myself, that with a girl like Caroline, so suited to take her place in the best sort of society that the world has to offer, it's a pity she shouldn't have it. But we've had that out together and she says she doesn't want it. She wants something else, which she thinks is better. I wish she could have had both; but if not, she's made her choice, with her eyes open, and I'm not going to say that I think she's wrong. She won't be losing everything that she has been brought up to either. What are your ideas about getting married?"

"We haven't talked about it much yet. It's for the future, when we can see ourselves settled somewhere."

Grafton sat thinking for some time. Then he got up from his chair. "Well, I expect you'll want to see Caroline now," he said. "I must go down and write some letters."

CHAPTER XVII

HOW THEY TOOK IT

WHEN Grafton left Maurice's room he went to the Long Gallery, where Caroline was sitting with Miss Waterhouse. When Caroline went away he stayed there. Miss Waterhouse had not yet expressed herself to him.

"Well, Dragon, what do you think of it all?" he asked her.

"I think you have been very wise, and very kind," she said.

"It had to be—eh?"

"Yes, I think it had to be, under the circumstances."

"What do you mean by the circumstances?"

"When two young people are brought together in the way they have been, I think love is likely to come of it."

Her answer made him vaguely uneasy. "That's what the world will say," he said. "If it were only that, it wouldn't be very satisfactory, would it? Don't you see a deeper suitability in it than there is on the surface? It's what I have to look for, to make it bearable."

"I think there is what you call a deeper suitability. I think Caroline will be happy in her marriage, when the time comes for it."

"You're not very enthusiastic, Dragon. Is *she* satisfied with your view of it?"

"I was the only person who knew anything until you came home. I sympathised with her. I saw how deep her love was. But I couldn't be enthusiastic until I knew how you would take it. I couldn't have said that you would have been wrong in asking at least for a term of probation, as you did in Beatrix's case."

"But I didn't ask for it—because I trusted Caroline to have faced all the objections she would know I should feel, and just exactly *not* to have allowed herself to fall in love owing to what you call the circumstances. She would know what she wanted, I said to myself. And she wouldn't change, whatever I did or said. It wouldn't have come to an end of itself, as Beatrix's affair did. I hope you're not going to say that my reasoning was wrong. It hasn't been very easy to sink all my own ideas—of fitness—of what one would expect in marriage for a girl like Caroline."

"I think you've been entirely right; more right than if you'd stood out, or even questioned it. It would have made no difference, and you'd have had to give way in the end. Nothing you could have done or said would have so added to dear Caroline's happiness as what you have said and done. She was dreading more than anything a separation in spirit from you. I know that, though she said little about it. Now that fear is removed she is blissfully happy. Nothing that anybody else says will matter to her at all."

"And yet you don't seem to think I reached my conclusions in the right way."

"What I think is that she couldn't have reasoned it out in the way you thought she had. A woman doesn't reason like that—or at least she doesn't. It was just her heart that guided her."

"But she did reason. She told me that if he hadn't been what she has found out for herself that he is, and she'd been inclined to fall in love with him—just in the way you say she has, with gratitude, and pity, working in her—I suppose that's what you mean—she'd have resisted it."

"I think she couldn't have fallen in love with him, unless he'd shown himself to her as he has. There wouldn't be anything, for *her*, to fall in love with. It was her heart prompted her all the time. But of course she has tried hard to see it all in the light that you have taught her to follow. She would want to satisfy you that she hadn't given her love lightly. She wouldn't have wanted to satisfy herself. She would have known that she was right."

"Do you think she's right, Dragon?"

"Yes, I do."

"And you're not disappointed that this has come about?"

"Not for her sake. I am for yours. You would have expected her to shine in the world you belong to, and that she has belonged to. You must suffer somewhat in your just pride in her. But it's a far

bigger thing to be able to sink that, and to want only her happiness, and to trust her to know where it lies. You'll certainly have your reward, though it may take some time to get over the disappointment. She'll love and trust you, as she couldn't have done if you had stood out ever so little."

"Well, you're very comforting, Dragon. Stimulating too. I told Worthing something of what I'd gone through about it, last night, and said that I shouldn't say as much to anybody else. But you're different. I shall have to stick up to Katharine Handsworth and Mary Grafton, and all the rest of them, when my own feeling will be much the same as theirs. I want something to support me."

"Yes. But I think it will all die down sooner than you think. All women are at heart sympathetic with a love match, you know. And they love Caroline. They won't want to make *her* feel that she is lowering herself."

"What about B?"

"Caroline has written to her, and to Barbara and Bunting. Whatever B has to say will be said to you, not to Caroline."

"B has been more critical of Maurice than anybody, you know."

"She will want that forgotten."

He was silent for a time, and then asked: "What are Caroline's ideas about getting married? She hasn't said anything to me about that yet."

"She has said very little to me. Having her en-

gement just on the right footing has been enough for her."

"Has she said anything at all?"

"She would expect to wait, I think, until he got some sort of place; then she would not mind in how small a way they began."

"Well, there's no reason why they should begin in such a very small way. If I accept Maurice as the right husband for her, I should naturally do for her what I did for B."

He had settled ten thousand pounds on Beatrix. Miss Waterhouse knew this. So did Caroline.

"They could marry at any time on that," she said. "And he will be earning something in a few months. Do you want them to marry soon?"

"Well now, I'll make a clean breast of it to you, my dear Dragon. As long as they are not married, I shan't be able to prevent myself having a sort of hope that they won't be, after all."

She smiled. "You will have more pleasure of her now," she said, "when she is settled in her new life."

"That's what I've told myself. She will be very careful, I know, to let it make as little difference between her and me as possible. But it can't be quite the same as it has been. She has given her love to him, and I must be second where I've been first. But when she's once married he'll have his place and I shall have mine. We shan't clash in any way. I'm happier about B now than I was for the month or two before she was married."

It was the first time he had alluded to Beatrix's attitude towards him at that time.

"I think B was selfish," she said at once. "Caroline won't be like that. Her love is as deep as B's—deeper, for she has a deeper nature—but it will not carry her away in the same way. She will never hurt others who love her."

"I should like to see her happily married, you know. She'll be more than she's ever been. It will complete her. She's one of the *right* people, Dragon. The deeper you go down, the more you find."

"Yes, she's like that, the dear child. And she has gained greatly in character since we came to live here."

"You've seen that, have you?"

"Oh, yes. It's the good simplicity in her."

"That's what she says she sees in him; it's where they come together. Well, he'll have his regular job here, next year. It won't be much, but with what I shall give her they could begin. They could have Stone Cottage. Do you think Caroline has thought of that at all?"

"She hasn't said anything about it. But it would be just the right beginning for them; and it would be delightful for us to have her so near."

"We should have to think of it as having *them* so near, shouldn't we? It would mean a lot to me, and to you too, and the children, to have her here; but—. Well, I've said nothing about it to her or to him yet. They may have some idea that they ought to wait till he can do it all, or most of it, for her. I don't want to

claim more than is my right in her, Dragon. I've had a bit of a lesson about that with B, you know."

"I think he would have no right to object to her doing more to support their home than he can at first. It is just where the difference, that you can't get over, comes in. Caroline ought not to be kept waiting because he is not the sort of young man she would have been expected to marry. What you would give her would help in any case, as it helps with Beatrix. It is only that in this case it would help much more. It would be just one of the many things she would bring him that he is very fortunate to get with her. It would be a test of the large simplicity she sees in him if he took it gratefully, and without question."

He laughed at her. "Why, Dragon," he said. "I believe, after all, you take Worthing's view of it—that it's infernal impudence of him to expect to get Caroline at all."

She smiled in return. "I have every hope that he will prove worthy of her," was all the answer she made to this charge.

Grafton made his offer to Caroline, and gained all he could have wanted in return from her glowing grateful expression of happiness. "Darling old Daddy, you *are* good to us," she said. "I do want to begin soon, but I didn't know whether it would be possible. Stone Cottage will be just perfect for us; we shall be near you, which will be lovely. I must go and tell Maurice at once."

Maurice thanked Grafton for this extra gift in a

way that pleased him. You've given me Caroline," he said, "and now you've given us both this. I have more to thank you for, Mr. Grafton, than I can ever say."

His gratitude showed itself continually in his attitude towards the older man. Grafton knew that affection and admiration were working in his mind towards him, and he had only to stretch out his hand and take it, if he wanted it. The workings of his own mind were contradictory. Outwardly, and with strong restraint over himself, he had done the utmost that could have been expected of him. He had sunk all his grudges, and hidden all his disappointment. But he knew that still more had to be done if he were to gain the contentment in Caroline's marriage that for her sake he was simulating. It could only be done by receiving Maurice as a son, and if he could not do that for Maurice's own sake as well as for Caroline's, she would find it out sooner or later, and her happiness would be dimmed. And her love for himself would have received a hurt.

He set himself to talk to Maurice, to find out what was in him, to make contact. He found all the boy's simple philosophy of life good and straight and true, and under the impulse of his great happiness and gratitude he found expression for it. His whole being was set towards Caroline. His ambitions were all towards fitting himself to be her worthy companion in life, and to bringing her the fruit of his gifts. These could never be to any considerable extent those to be

exchanged for money, and his thoughts did not run on the lines of a successful career. He would be worth a good position in the limited field to which he would devote his energies, and he took it for granted that it would come to him by and bye. For himself he looked upon it only as giving him further scope for the work for which he was fitting himself. There was never any hint of increased opportunities for his own pleasure in the future. He would have the full fruition of his own desires from the first, and he would owe it to Caroline and in a secondary degree to Grafton. It was she whom he would work and live for. There was a more single-minded devotion in his attitude towards her than in Dick's towards Beatrix. All Dick's life and work would be sweetened by Beatrix's love, but they would be pursued, as the life and work of most men are pursued, for their own ends. Caroline would be the end and aim of Maurice's whole existence.

Grafton was soothed in his spirit by this whole-hearted homage paid to his girl. She was worth every bit of it, but a lover does not always honour his mistress for what she is; it is often enough for him if she is what he wants her to be. Grafton would have been up in arms at once if Maurice had shown himself merely overjoyed at winning Caroline, and holding himself as if he had only gained his deserts. He was not prepared to look upon her as fulfilling her destiny in decorating and solacing Maurice's unimportant life, however she might think of herself and her duties towards him. But if Maurice looked upon himself as owing

her lifelong devotion and service, his relationship towards her brought no sense of assumption to her father. It was the right relationship in his view, and he could rest himself upon it, as the conviction strengthened itself that it was based upon something stable and sure in Maurice's character.

Taking pains to find qualities in him that he had not troubled to look for before, he was inclined to wonder that he had thought him dull and uninteresting in conversation. When he had something real to talk about he could talk as well as another, if he were encouraged to do so. The difference that had always hampered him with Grafton, as a much older man, most of whose experiences and interests were beyond his reach, was being solved by the affection that was reaching out for expression. The most learned of men find pleasure in the conversation of those who are not learned, if it is natural, and especially if there is affection to influence it. And Grafton was not learned; his brains were no better than Maurice's, though expression of them came easier to him.

He knew, by the end of those two days, before he went back to his work in London, that he had only to open his heart to Maurice, and he would gain from him all that a man who loved his daughter could want from her husband. He had Dick's affection and friendship. Maurice's was just as well worth having, and it would be given him in still greater measure.

As he travelled up to London he smiled to himself as he remembered the way the Prescotts had received

the news. They were the only people, except Miss Waterhouse and Worthing, who knew of it yet.

They had guessed it, Viola had said in triumph. She had told Gerry it was bound to happen, and he had said he had seen it before she had, upon which had followed a fearsome quarrel. The one thing Gerry would *not* stand was anybody being cleverer than himself, and unless she was prepared to acknowledge herself a sort of bat-eyed idiot their married life would be wrecked sooner or later.

Neither of them had seen anything at all unsuitable in an engagement between Maurice and Caroline. In fact they had seemed to expect Grafton to be at least as pleased about it as they were themselves. He had not led them to suppose that he was not pleased, but had given them opportunities of showing the opinion they held about Maurice.

They had laid stress on his complete unselfishness. "He'll go out of his way to help anybody," Prescott had said. "And he does it because it's his nature to, not because he thinks he ought to. He thinks about himself less than anybody I've ever known. Caroline will have a splendid husband."

There was the unworldly view. The question of station in life did not interest the Prescotts. Grafton knew that it would interest the people he would see in London considerably.

CHAPTER XVIII

MORE OPINIONS

THE House in Cadogan Place had been given up, and Grafton had taken a flat. Beatrix dined with him there on Monday. Dick was stationed at Chatham, but was unable to get away that evening.

Beatrix was radiantly happy, and more beautiful than ever. She was growing up to herself all round. Every time that he saw her, Grafton congratulated himself anew upon having saved her from that other marriage. Perhaps at first she would have shown herself just as happy in it; but he would always have been looking for developments, and changes, none of which he would have expected to be for the better. Now he knew that all her charm of character could find safe play, and add to her own happiness and the happiness of those about her, and that its deeper qualities would be brought into being too, fostered and strengthened. There was a quality of all-round fitness in her marriage upon which he, who loved her, could rest himself with pleasure. And she was always demonstratively affectionate towards him when they met, though not quite in the same way as she had been before her marriage. All her thoughts were centred in Dick, and if he had not been prepared to accept Dick as deserving of all that she gave him, he would

have felt the difference. But there was nothing about Dick that he did not like and respect. He had taken him in, as he had told Caroline he must be able to take in his daughters' husbands, if he were not to feel too acutely their loss, and as he was now struggling to take Maurice in, for Caroline's sake, and also for his own.

"Daddy, darling, how *awful* this is about Caroline!" was Beatrix's first word upon that subject.

He had not expected quite such a determined expression of opinion, and hardly knew what to reply for the moment. It gave him a slight sinking of heart, he had no time to ask himself why.

"You haven't told her you think it's awful, have you?" he asked.

"Oh, no, of course not. I've written her a very nice letter. So has Dick. And we've both written to Maurice. It seems funny to have to call him Maurice. If she's *got* to marry him, Dick says we must treat him as if we were pleased about it. And she told us that you had been simply adorable about it. So we knew that was the line you'd like us to take. But you can't really be pleased, are you, Dad?"

"Why do you think it's so awful?" he asked.

"Oh, Daddy, darling, *look* at him! Look at him beside a man like Dick."

This rather annoyed him, but he did not show it. "Oh, well, look at *anybody* beside Dick!" he said, pinching her chin.

Dinner was announced at that moment, and the sub-

ject was avoided until the servant left them alone together. Then Grafton spoke immediately. "Look here, B darling," he said, "I hope you won't go about crabbing this marriage of Cara's. If you do, she's bound to find it out sooner or later, and it will make her unhappy. It won't alter anything. She won't take your view of him, you know, and it can only divide her from you. It will make a cleavage in our family, and that's just what I don't want. You'll each have your own homes, but your old home will be a centre for all of you too. This chap will be part of the family now, and we've got to accept him, for Caroline's sake."

She laughed at him. "This chap!" she repeated. "You darling transparent old thing! You think it's just as odd as I do—her marrying like that. You didn't talk of Dick as 'this chap!'"

He was annoyed with himself for the slip. He had not meant to excuse or explain himself to Beatrix, but now he would have to. "That's just what I was warning you about," he said. "I don't deny that there are certain things one has to get over, and until you do get over them you're likely to let drop something that shows you haven't quite. That's what you must be careful about."

"Well, darling, I'm glad you haven't been so careful as all that, with me. You can quite safely tell me everything. It wouldn't be nice of you to pretend before me. I might think it very splendid of you, but I shouldn't love you more for it. I'm quite ready to

back you up in keeping what you really think from Caroline."

He felt the ground slipping from beneath his feet. "What does Dick say about it?" he asked. "Can't he see anything in Maurice that all the world can't see?"

"He thinks he is very nice; but of course he doesn't look upon him as a suitable husband for Caroline. He doesn't think you can either, and he can't make out why you don't try to stop it. You did with me—before—and we've never ceased blessing you for it."

"I didn't try to stop it with you because that fellow—I suppose you've no objection to my calling him that—"

"You can call him what you like, darling."

"Well, I didn't object to him because he hadn't got enough money. That's about what it would come to here."

"Oh, no, it isn't, darling. And you don't think it is either."

"Oh, if you can't talk about it sensibly, B, we'd better chuck it." He rose from the table.

She rose too and slipped her arm into his as they went into the other room, and laughed at him. "I think it's awfully sweet of you to want to make the best of it," she said. "I won't worry you any more, darling, if you're certain that nothing *can* stop it."

"Well, you ought to be able to see it as I do. You know what Caroline is. She wouldn't give her love, and take it away again when the sort of objections

that you feel towards Maurice are pointed out to her. She's faced all that, and it doesn't matter to her. She sees a lot more in him than you can, or than I've been able to; though I tell you that there *is* a lot in him, and *I'm* quite ready to accept him. So you—and Dick—ought to make the effort too."

They were standing together before the fire, her arm still in his. Her face was graver, as she said: "Caroline *is* different to me. That's quite true."

"I haven't meant anything I've said to reflect on you."

"I know, darling. But you wouldn't treat it like that if it were me, all the same. Well, of course we shall be as nice about it as ever we can, and if he does turn into something that makes him more equal to Caroline it will be all the easier. It's quite beyond me to think of him as her equal now, Dad, so you mustn't expect me to do it."

"Oh, well, don't show it; that's all I ask," he said.

The view taken of the affair by Lady Grafton, whom he saw in the course of the week, was that it was his own fault for burying Caroline in the country. If he hadn't wanted her there whenever he went down to Abington she would have gone about more and met the right sort of men.

"Oh, my dear Mary!" he said. "She has been meeting what you call the right sort of men all her life. She doesn't want the life she'd lead with them. And as for saying that I've kept her down there, you know that's ridiculous. As a matter of fact it has

rather worried me that she never wanted to go anywhere else, and I'd told her so."

"I suppose she had fallen in love with this youth, and didn't want to go away."

"Now you're talking more ridiculously than ever. I believe she was as much surprised as I was when she found out what had happened to her."

"That doesn't sound very likely, George. You told me once that you would know all about it when Caroline's time came; and I told you, I remember, that you wouldn't know anything about it at all. And that's what has happened."

"I suppose you want to annoy me, Mary. You can be the most exasperating of women, and I wonder James has put up with you as long as he has."

"James knows when he's well off. I've never given him a moment's uneasiness in all my blameless life. Why on earth can't you get this put off, as you did with B? You acted so wisely there; and see what a reward you have had! She has made just the right sort of marriage, and is as happy as happy can be. It's delightful to see her."

This speech had the effect of restoring his good humour. He laughed at her. "That's pretty cool, after the way you went for me last year, about B," he said.

"You're very difficult to please. I said you had been wise, as things have turned out. I didn't say I thought you so wise a year ago. If you knew anything about women you'd see how great a concession I've made in ac-

knowledging that you were right, and I was wrong. Now there's a marriage in question much more unsatisfactory than that would have been you sit by and do nothing. You can't possibly like it, and I know quite well why you're giving in. I don't think you ought."

"Why do you suppose I am giving in?"

"Because you're so weak with your girls that you daren't go against them. You're afraid they wouldn't be pleased with you."

He laughed again. "Illogical creature!" he said. "B wasn't at all pleased with me, and I stuck out, for her sake."

"And made an awful lot of fuss about it too. You're afraid of the same thing happening with Caroline, and you daren't face it. That's the plain truth behind all this talk of her knowing exactly what she wants, and your accepting her judgment rather than your own. She knows exactly what she wants now because she's in love. A woman can't judge a man when she's in love with him."

"Perhaps not; but she can judge him before, and Caroline has known this particular man for over a year. So have I, and I say that there's a lot more in him than a person like you can take into account."

"Ah, now you're being abominably rude, which shows that I've made an impression on you. No man can stand being put in the wrong. If you had half the pluck that you think you have you'd risk Caroline behaving to you like B did, and save her from making a mistake."

"You see, I don't think she *is* making a mistake. You don't know Caroline as well as I do."

"I know Caroline very well. And I know women in general much better than you do."

"On the outside, perhaps. But you're rather a shallow character yourself, and one wouldn't expect you to understand everything about a girl like Caroline. You're also the least little bit of a snob. Most people are, and it's nothing particular against you."

"It's no use trying to make me angry, because you won't succeed. If I can stand being called a snob I can stand anything, and it doesn't make the least impression on me. Besides, it's a ridiculous charge in this connection."

"You don't object to young Bradby for anything that he is in himself; you only object because you don't think he's a good match for Caroline."

"Quite so. But that's not snobbery; it's common sense. However, I see you're determined to have your own way, and I shan't say any more. You have the air of being one of the most reasonable men in the world, and you're really one of the most obstinate, as well as quite one of the rudest. However, no woman who didn't know you as well as I do would be likely to find that out, and in a general way your manners are charming. Now you have lost B, and are going to sacrifice Caroline, I think you might do what I once advised you to, and marry again, yourself. It would put an end to all this acute annoyance you show so plainly when somebody else comes along to interfere

with the arrangements you have made for a comfortable family life that shall centre round yourself."

There was a pause, and then Grafton threw his head back and roared with laughter. "That's in return for the accusation of snobbery, I suppose," he said.

Lady Grafton laughed too. "I can be just as rude as you can," she said, "and I can do it much more subtly. I wish you wouldn't make me laugh, and spoil everything. I'm extremely annoyed with you, and there are a lot more offensive things I should like to say. However, I dare say you'll give me another chance. But seriously, George, this isn't the sort of marriage Caroline ought to make. I've seen the young man, and I've nothing against him in his proper place. But he is hopelessly *gauche* and middle-class. That's bound to tell by and bye. Women are supposed to have no real discrimination about men, and there's this much truth in it that they can and do fall in love with men who are beneath them, just as men fall in love with women who are beneath them. But when they've been brought up like Caroline they simply can't ally themselves with people not of their own class. Before many years are up she'll be criticising him for his deficiencies. If she does marry him of course her relations aren't going to throw her over for it, but she'll drop out completely. Some men can learn, and raise themselves from the class they were born in, especially if they have clever wives; but I'm sure this young man isn't one of them. He'll keep her down to

what he is himself, and really, George, it's a good deal below what Caroline is, or what she ought to be given over to."

"Well, Mary, you've put it sensibly at last. But you're wrong in several particulars, all the same. If it were as simple and obvious as all that I should agree with you; so would Caroline, for that matter, and she wouldn't want to marry him. What you've missed altogether is that the boy has character. I've come to see it already, and he'll grow into something that she can be proud of. Another thing you've missed is that she really doesn't want to live in the usual round. She has kept herself almost entirely out of it for the last eighteen months, because she likes her quiet country life better. She'll have that with him, and she'll get more companionship in the sort of things she likes doing than with a fellow like Francis Parry, for instance."

"Ah, poor Francis! I don't know what *he'll* say when he hears about it. Fancy preferring young Bradby to a man like that! Well, if Caroline really does, and you're going to back her up in it, she's not quite what I thought she was, and I suppose I'd better let it alone."

"I really think you had, Mary. If Caroline isn't quite what you thought she was, I assure you she hasn't deteriorated. As far as I'm concerned there's something in all your jibes, but not as much as you think there is. I do hate losing my girls. They've been more to me than most daughters are to their fathers, because I've only had them. But because I

feel like that, I should be all the more careful not to let it affect my actions towards them. My thoughts perhaps I can't help it affecting. And it's true that I shrink from going through with Caroline what I did with B. But that wouldn't deter me from standing out if I saw good reason to do so. I don't; so I'm not going to spoil things by giving in grudgingly."

"You're even going to hurry on the marriage, I hear. And you're providing them with a house—of course at Abington. I don't object to that though. Caroline won't lose everything that she's been used to having, and if you get rather more of her society than you're entitled to, perhaps you deserve it, as you're acting so nobly."

Which left the last word with Lady Grafton.

Lady Handsworth was not so critical. She said that she did not understand it, but she seemed more ready than Lady Grafton to agree that any man whom Caroline loved must be worth loving. She thought it a pity that Grafton should not allow time to work, as he might well have done under all the circumstances, instead of making it possible for Caroline to marry at once without giving her time to think better of it. But Lady Handsworth had never seen Maurice, and did not regard him, as Lady Grafton did, as below the point of gentility with which Caroline ought to ally herself. So her objections were not likely to be so strong, and Grafton managed to satisfy her that holding out would not alter matters, and that an early marriage would make for Caroline's happiness.

Young George had a 'short leave' during this week and spent it with his father. He had no objections to urge against the marriage. "I like Maurice, and always have," he said. "I think he'll make a jolly good husband for Caroline, Dad, if you help 'em along a bit. I don't suppose he'll ever make much boodle; but as long as they have enough to get on with I don't think Caroline will mind that."

Grafton was pleased to find his son holding these views. There is nobody more critical of outward appearance than an Eton boy of Young George's age, and if Maurice had succeeded in impressing himself upon him to this extent, it showed that his departure from recognised type was no serious hindrance to him.

"What does the illustrious Jimmy say about it?" he asked.

"Jimmy doesn't know Maurice as well as I do. He can only see that he doesn't brush his hair well, and all that sort of thing. His people are all right, aren't they, Dad?"

"Oh, yes. One of his brothers called on me at the Bank yesterday. *His* hair was brushed all right, and he would have passed all Jimmy's tests. I like your view much better, Bunting. I dare say I should have taken Jimmy's when I was your age, but as you grow older you learn to judge by other standards. I'm glad you've begun to do that already."

"Well, I suppose if it was anybody I didn't know so well as I do Maurice I might not care about it much for Caroline. That's why I don't blame Jimmy

much, though he's rather a swanky ass over that sort of thing."

"What is it you like particularly about Maurice? He's so much younger than I am—and always seemed rather alarmed in my presence—that I hadn't sized him up as well as you seem to have done."

Young George was flattered at having his opinion asked in this way, and thought a little before answering. "One of the things I like about him is just that he doesn't try to swank," he said. "I suppose it wouldn't be very difficult to make your hair stick down and buy the right sort of ties and collars if you wanted to. But he doesn't think it's important. He's as keen as mustard on making the best of himself in other ways. He thinks everybody has his own line in life if he can only find it. He's found his all right, but he did his work as well as he knew how, as long as he was in that beastly bank. We've talked a lot about that sort of thing. I like him as a pal as well as anybody I know, except you, Dad."

"Have you talked about your own career in life, Bunting?"

"We've talked a good deal about school. He thinks most fellows don't take their work seriously enough. He did his, but he says he hasn't got that sort of brain, and didn't make much of a hand at it. But he says it makes all the difference if you look upon school work as something you've got responsibility for, yourself, and don't leave it all to the beaks, to see that they get something out of you."

"Have you acted on his advice?"

"Well, yes, I have. I'm supposed to be rather a sap at school. But I find it rather jolly to take an intelligent interest in what I'm doing. Saves a lot of trouble with the beaks too."

"You never told me that, old boy. I'm glad to hear it."

"Well, I thought you were keener on my getting my eleven some day, Dad."

Grafton laughed. "Oh, we fathers!" he said. "And then they complain of a public-school education. But I like the idea of your working too, Bunting. I'm afraid I had nobody to string me up to it when I was at school; but I've done some work since, and liked doing it as well as anything. You'll find most men who are worth anything do. And certainly school work is interesting if you make it so for yourself. Maurice is a worker, isn't he? That's something good about him."

"Oh, yes; and he's dead straight too. He's a chap you can't help having a respect for. Of course I like Dick, awfully. He's straight too, and keen on his job. But I think there's even more in Maurice than there is in Dick. He wouldn't have done for B, but he'll do all right for Caroline. He thinks all the world of her, too. I know that."

"Did you see this coming, then, Bunting?"

"Well, no, I didn't. I didn't think she liked him in that sort of way, though she was always jolly decent to him. She seemed a lot older than him, and of course

he is a bit different from the men she's made friends with before. But I'm glad she's had the sense to see what a good chap he is. Jimmy says she might have married anybody, and it's a come-down for her. But I don't think so."

"Nor do I, old son," said Grafton. "Nothing that Caroline could possibly do would be a come-down for her. She's one of the people you can always trust to do what's right."

"She gets it from you, Dad."

"No, old boy. She gets it from somebody much better than me."

CHAPTER XIX

AFTER THE WEDDING

CAROLINE was married at the beginning of the year. The Abbey was full of guests, as for Beatrix's wedding, but there was no occasion to find other rooms elsewhere; there had not been such a demand for invitations. Caroline had wanted a very quiet wedding. She was not going to marry into a more or less exalted position, as Beatrix had done, and was going to begin, and continue, her married life in a very modest way. But her father had wanted no difference made between her and Beatrix, and she had given way.

It must be confessed, however, that her wedding was not the bright success that Beatrix's had been. It was, at the outset, one of those social functions which were to be dropped out of Caroline's life altogether. Maurice was not calculated to shine in them, in any capacity, least of all as a leading figure. He was as well dressed as he ever could be—Worthing had seen to that—but he did not look at ease in his wedding garments, and his almost bucolic air was heightened rather than diminished by them. Also he looked extraordinarily young; and a man who depends on the virile force within him, and lacks most of the graces of youth, does not show to any advantage until the years have passed over his head. The contrast between him and

Caroline, in the full flower of her young grace and beauty, was so marked as scarcely to escape the notice of the most sympathetic, and there were many there who were far from being sympathetic with a marriage which in their view was nothing short of a misalliance. Nobody expressed this view to Grafton, but those who held it showed themselves rather too careful not to. Its atmosphere was all around him, and he felt more uncomfortable and doubtful than at any time since he had brought himself to consent.

When the bride and bridegroom had driven off he was feeling so depressed that he determined to escape his duties as host for a time, and slip out for a walk. There was nearly an hour of winter twilight left, and a sharp frost. A fast walk would brace him in mind and body.

He went upstairs to change his clothes. He could get down by a staircase at the other end of the corridor and escape from the house without being seen, except perhaps by some of the servants.

As he slipped into a tweed suit and put on a pair of thick-soled boots his unease of mind deepened. His black hour was upon him. Only at the death of his wife sixteen years before had he felt the heavy weight upon his mind that he felt now. But for that one big grief he had dwelt in the sunshine of prosperity, pleasure, the liking of his friends, the love of his children. The upset of mind he had endured over Beatrix a year before had been by far the biggest that had troubled him for all those long years, and that

had never brought him the black cloud that was settling on him now.

The marked difference in atmosphere between Caroline's wedding and Beatrix's was not the cause of his mood, though it heightened, and perhaps had induced it. He had tested and examined himself so searchingly during the past weeks that the plainly-to-be-noticed disapproval of others could not now affect his own conviction that he had taken the right course. All of those who had a right to express their opinions had had their opportunity of expressing them directly to him, and he had answered them. And he had satisfied himself, by many signs and tokens, of Maurice's essential fitness for the great trust he had reposed in him. He already felt an affection for the boy; that was the reward he had gained from sinking his own prejudices, and making a strong effort to see him with Caroline's eyes. It was a big reward. It had removed from him all the discomfort of feeling that she was wasting her fine gifts upon one who could give her no adequate return for them. He had come to see that she was fulfilling herself in this marriage, and that the expression of her true and tender nature would flower beautifully under it, though its flowering might be hidden from the world at large.

Nor had he had to make the adjustments of his own attitude that had troubled him when Beatrix had given her love. Caroline had come to be more to him than ever before, because he had been able to enter with her into the deeper places of her heart. That reward he

had also gained from his self-suppression. She trusted him and loved him, and had shown it as she had always shown it, without once causing him to feel that he was ever so little shouldered out of his place in her heart.

And yet the sense of irreparable loss was there in this black hour, and was growing deeper every moment. He hurried on his changing so as to get away by himself and keep it at bay by fast movement; and, if he could, to fight it down and regain his accustomed equanimity.

It was the sense of change and passing in his own life that had descended upon him so heavily as Caroline had driven off from her old home, with her face set towards her new one. With parents happily married, where family life is welded by strong affection and community of taste and pursuit, there comes this sense of breaking up when their children begin to leave them. They are no longer the centre round which their children's lives revolve. Mothers feel it most when their boys go to school, fathers when their daughters marry. But the family life goes on; though not in its fullest measure. Grafton's had come to an end. He might have Barbara with him for a time when she had finished her education. Young George would only occasionally be at home, for years to come. Miss Waterhouse would be there. That was all that would remain of the happy years in which he had had them all around him.

Caroline would be near him, but no longer in his home, to surround him with all the devotion that had

brought him such solace since the death of her mother. He had not known how much he depended upon her until Beatrix's marriage. She had been almost everything to him since, and had kept him from the sense of loss that was weighing on him now, when Beatrix had left him. But it was the loss of both of them that he was feeling, and the end and finish of the longest and one of the best chapters of his life. What was his life to be in the future? It was that question to which he wanted to find some sort of answer before he faced again the people who had come to celebrate the opening of a new chapter for Caroline, but the close of one for him.

When he was ready to leave his room he paused before the portrait of his young wife hanging over the mantelpiece. He had never wanted her more than he did now, to tread the downward slope with him.

As he went along the corridor, the door of a room on the other side of it opened, and Ella Carruthers, who was staying in the house, came out. She also was dressed in tweeds and walking boots, and as they looked at one another she laughed and said: "I see we both want the same thing—to get away for a bit and think about it."

His first feeling was one of annoyance. Caught like that, he could not suggest that he should go his way and she hers. But he wanted no companionship in his efforts to face what he had to face.

But when he had said lightly: "We'll go for a sharp walk together, but don't let anybody else see us," he

became conscious that just this companionship would be good for him.

She had been so much with his daughters that she was almost like one of his own family. She was only three or four years older than Caroline. During the disturbance of mind he had undergone at the time of Beatrix's engagement to Lassigny she had given him more help than anybody—more help even than Caroline, because she had a wider knowledge and experience; and she had shown wisdom with Beatrix too, who had listened to her when she would have listened to nobody else. If anybody could do so, she would help him over his dark hour.

So they set out together through the park, making for unfrequented roads and lanes, and walking fast.

Neither of them spoke for some time. Then Ella said: "I'm afraid it hasn't been much of a success; but I think you were right all the same."

"Right in what?" he asked. "In having a *pukka* wedding?"

"I didn't mean that, but I think you were right there, too. It showed, anyhow, that *you* weren't ashamed of it."

This was pretty plain speaking. But he had encouraged that from her. And she had already discussed Maurice with him.

"It was rather tiresome to have them all turning up their noses at him," he said. "It reflected on Caroline, and I felt it because of that. For myself I don't mind much. I took my own line long ago, and I've no reason

to regret it. If you've done what you think is right, you're not much affected by the opinion of other people, especially when they don't judge by your standards. Do you think my poor little Caroline noticed it?"

"Noticed the sort of atmosphere of disapproval, do you mean?"

"She can hardly have helped noticing it. Did she mind?"

"I expect she would rather not have had him subjected to that test. It's the worst he'll ever have to go through, poor boy. But she would look upon it in the same way as you do—only more so. She would know that they couldn't judge him as she does. I expect it would make her feel all the more tender towards him. What he is is for her alone."

"Then I don't think we need worry. And it's all over for her now. All over for me, too. Ella, I'm feeling it damnably. I came out to get myself straight. As you've come with me you must allow me to be purely egoistic. I want to go back rather happier than I came out. You helped me before; I believe you can help me now."

"I'll try," she said. "I expect I know something about it."

"I don't think you can know much, my dear. It will be a good many years yet before you have to face the fact that you're getting old."

She laughed lightly. "If that's what's the matter with you," she said, "I can sweep the trouble away altogether. You've always seemed to me about as

young as any of us, and you'll go on being young till you die. It isn't a question of years. I thought it was the reaction of the last few months."

"Well, I suppose it is. But what do you mean by that?"

"I think you've behaved most awfully well," she said. "I've admired you very much for it, and I'm glad I can say so."

"Oh, you mean about accepting Maurice. But that's all over long ago. It was a bit difficult at first, but it hasn't been difficult lately. No, it isn't that, except that the late performance hasn't cheered me up exactly. I think I should feel just the same if Caroline had married somebody that all the world would have accepted as suited to her. It has brought my life as I've lived it to an end. That's what's the matter with me, Ella. I've got to rearrange it for myself, and it's rather a bleak prospect."

"Tell me about it," she said. "I don't quite see."

"Well, I suppose most men of my sort, who have work that suits them, and enough money to get all the pleasures they want, are more or less content with that when they get to my age, even if their children mean a good deal to them. But I'm not. Family life has been the best thing I've had, and I don't know what I shall do without it."

"You haven't lost them all, have you? And when you come down here you'll have Caroline almost as much as before."

"Ah, but it won't be the same. That came simply

rushing over me as she drove away. She's been the dearest daughter to me. She's centred herself on me. I suppose she's made me selfish. She's given me all that she could of what her mother would have given me. I've never valued her half enough. I think I loved B better than her when they were both children. Not much better, but perhaps enough to make her feel the difference. That's rather a bad memory just now. I may have done it in ways that I haven't meant to, that may have hurt her."

"I'm sure you needn't trouble yourself about that, dear Mr. Grafton," she said, with some earnestness. "She is devoted to you, in a way she couldn't be if you hadn't been just as much to her as she has to you. It has been lovely to see you together. And what you've been able to do lately has cemented it all as nothing else could have done. I know she's felt it deeply, because she's told me so. She's full of gratitude and love for you. And I think you've earned it all. Oh, *please* don't trouble yourself in that way. I'm sure you needn't."

"Well, perhaps I needn't. There can't have been much wrong, or she wouldn't have been able to give me what she has. I don't think it's that, either, that is descending on me now. Things are right between me and all my children. I've only lost what every man must lose when he gets to my age; only, like Mrs. Gummidge, I feel it more. They have been my chosen companions. They've kept me young between them. It isn't only that I love them. I've liked doing things

with them better than with anybody else. I get on with other men as well as most people. Perhaps before the children grew up I enjoyed myself going about and amusing myself with my friends as much as any man could. But for the last few years, and especially since we came to live here, I've liked being with them better than anybody—I never knew how much better until just now. When I've been up in London I've been looking forward all the week to getting down here again. I tell you, it's a bleak prospect to go back to the sort of life I found pleasant enough ten years ago. I think I've outgrown it. It's just passing the time. There's nothing left to make it worth while."

She was silent for a time, and then said: "You know, your case and mine aren't so very different. Until you all came to live here, and took me in so happily, I was really only passing the time. It has made a lot of difference to me getting all the companionship and affection I have had here. I feel the break up of your family, too. It has been a delightful bit of life, and I feel it hasn't lasted half long enough. Still, it isn't really all over, though it has altered. Caroline will be here, and Barbara by and bye. Beatrix and Bunting, too, sometimes; and I count for a little, don't I, Mr. Grafton? You've let me think myself almost one of your family."

"Oh, my dear child, you've made yourself part of it as nobody else has. I couldn't talk like this to anybody but you—not even to the Dragon, who has an indulgent eye for my weaknesses. It is weak, I

suppose, to grouse as I'm doing. The children are happy, and I've helped to make them so. It's only myself I'm thinking of, and I shan't inflict my troubles on anybody after this. You've caught me just at the time."

"I'm very glad I have," she said. "Perhaps I can do something for you in return for all you've done for me. One of the last things Caroline said to me, upstairs, was, 'Take care of my darling old Daddy, while I'm away.' So you see *she* was thinking of you, left alone, up to the last; and she treats me as one of the family. I know I can't take her place, or B's; but I can do something if you'll let me. You've been awfully good to me. You've always given me help when I've wanted it, and it hasn't been altogether easy to behave myself as a responsible person, when I'm still young enough to prefer to be looked after."

He smiled at her kindly. "All women want looking after," he said. "But you've shown yourself remarkably capable."

She smiled in return, rather ruefully. "I try to be," she said. "But I don't always feel it. It has been a great comfort to know I could apply to you in my difficulties. You'll let me make some return now, won't you? Caroline entrusted me to you, you know."

"The dear child! Well, my dear, you've done me good already. I thought you would. Yes, you've made yourself one of us, Ella. It won't be so desolating to come down here, if you're about. I shall be bringing people down, but they won't make up to me

for the loss of my girls. You will; so I shall hope to see you over here as much as ever."

They reached the house again, and went in by the same way. Barbara met them in the upstairs corridor. "Dad, I've been looking for you everywhere," she said. "Where ever have you both been?"

"For a little walk to clear our brains," he said. "Now we're ready to take up our duties again. What do you want, darling?"

It seemed that she wanted nothing in particular. She talked to him for half a minute outside his room, and then went downstairs to join the rest.

That evening Ella found herself in a corner of the Long Gallery with Lady Grafton, with whom she had made friends.

"You're looking very beautiful to-night," said her ladyship, with an appraising and approving eye on her, "and most surprisingly young. How old are you, exactly? I should have said about nineteen."

"Thank you very much," said Ella. "I'm twenty-five. Sometimes I feel immeasurably older, but my happiest state is when I can think of myself as still a girl."

"Well, you look like one to-night; as I said, about nineteen. I can't think why you haven't married again. You must often have thought of it."

She blushed, quite like a girl. She was tall and slim and upright, and had some of the lithe grace of a beautiful Greek boy. She was beautiful in feature and colouring too, though it was not the kind of beauty

that is always radiantly apparent, as Beatrix's was. But to-night she was at her best, and deserved the encomiums passed upon her by Lady Grafton, who was nothing if not critical.

"Nobody has wanted me," she said.

"Oh, come, my dear! Don't tell me that you've been about as much as you have, and with all you have to offer, without attracting the foolish race of men."

"Anyhow, nobody has wanted me whom I have wanted. My first experience wasn't a very happy one. I suppose you know that, and there's no harm in saying so."

"Not a bit. But you're through with it, and it hasn't left much mark. None that I can see, except that you're wiser. You wouldn't marry again without knowing what you were letting yourself in for. Men are easy enough to judge if you look at them with your eyes open. Of course when you're once in love with them you don't. But you can marry first and fall in love afterwards. It saves lots of bothers and gives you something interesting to do at the beginning of married life, which is apt to be rather dull."

Ella laughed. "I shouldn't care to run that risk," she said. "One's freedom is worth something, after all. I shouldn't want to marry anybody unless I loved him."

"No. You're very young still. You've a right to look for that sort of thing. But there's love and love. Unless you find yourself bowled over by a passion,

which may happen to anybody unless they're on the lookout—at least, I'm told so; it hasn't happened to me yet—I should pick out a man you like and can trust to look after you, and make you happy. It's much more comfortable in the long run, and if you manage him properly you'll have all the love that's good for you, and the sort that lasts."

"Supposing he doesn't pick me!"

"Oh, my dear, you could make any man pick you. You'd only have to pay him a little attention, and flatter his vanity. They're all the same, when they arrive at years of indiscretion. That sounds rather clever. I suppose you wouldn't want quite a young man. I should think you wouldn't have much difficulty there either, though they want more careful handling; they're so full of whims and crotchets. But I shouldn't recommend quite a young man. Five and thirty to two or three and forty is the best age. I wish George was ten years or so younger. Then you might marry him, and we should keep you in the family. He's the dearest old affectionate bat-eyed creature, really, though I never let him know that I think so."

"Why do you call him bat-eyed? I don't propose to accept your invitation, but I love him all the same; and I don't think he's bat-eyed."

"Oh, my dear—the fuss he's made about his girls! I've had it all out with him. He thinks he's been actuated solely by the most unselfish desire for their happiness, when all the time he's just been hating it

because he can't keep them forever circling round himself."

"I think you're very unfair. He does love them awfully, and of course he hates losing them. But the way he's behaved about Caroline shows that he hasn't been thinking of what he wants himself. I feel very sorry for him now. He has to begin all over again, and he isn't a bit like an old man, who can sit down and wait for the end. He's as young in his mind and in his tastes as if he were twenty years younger."

"Yes, he's more of a baby than most men of his age, and that's saying a good deal. He's kept himself fit too. Oh, I don't deny that it has been a good thing for him to have his children to play with. No doubt it has kept him out of a lot of mischief. And I'm rather sorry for him losing them, too, though I don't tell him so. He's too apt to be sorry for himself; and after all, he's got to put up with it, like everybody else."

"How unfeeling you are! I'm not going to hear my dear Mr. Grafton criticised in that way without protesting. If he had really been selfish, as most men are, he would just have gone on amusing himself and hardly have missed the girls at all. It's no discredit to him that he has been so happy in his home that he can't bear it to be broken up."

"I suppose he was grouching and grumbling about that when you went out for a walk this afternoon."

Ella wondered how she knew that they had been out for a walk, but did not ask her. "He wasn't,"

she said indignantly. "You say you like him, and you're always trying to make him out a poor weak creature with no backbone at all. I think he's a very wise man, and a good one too. I love him for loving his family as much as he does."

"Oh, well, my dear, if you love him, I don't want anything better. I told him the other day he ought to marry again, now the time has come for him to lose his girls. He made his first wife happy enough, and he'd make you. He's no longer young, but he isn't old either, and won't be for a long time to come. He's a husband you could be proud of, and he'd never let you down."

"Thanks for the offer. I'll wait till he makes it himself, and then I'll think about it. But please don't make mischief, or try to manage. As a matter of fact, I think the idea would rather shock him, and it isn't one that appeals to me, or I shouldn't talk about it as I'm doing now. He has been awfully sweet to me, and treated me very much like the rest. It has been just what I've wanted, for I was lonely till they came here. I'm going to keep it up, and help him to get over *his* bad time—dear Mr. Grafton! If you go spreading *those* ideas about you'll make it difficult for me. So please don't."

"I should be a precious fool if I did," said Lady Grafton enigmatically.

CHAPTER XX

CAROLINE'S HOME-COMING

CAROLINE and Maurice went to the South of France for their honeymoon, and were away a month. On their return they spent a couple of days in Paris, where Barbara was again installed for her last three months with her 'family.'

Barbara had taken very kindly to Maurice. She had cleared the ground by telling him everything she could think of that she had ever said about him from the first. "Now if you can like me after that," she said, "well and good. We shall be friends for life. If not, say so at once, and I shall know what to do."

Maurice had replied that he should have no difficulty in liking her if she would permit him, and she had forthwith taken him under her wing and given him several valuable hints on points of behaviour, from which he professed himself greatly to have profited. He had given her some in return, and they were on the best of terms together.

She was allowed to spend the days with them while they were in Paris. Caroline soon discovered that she was not happy, and was longing to be at home again. She clung to her side rather pathetically, and was quieter than her wont, though her quietness was varied by bursts of gaiety. Caroline made an opportunity

of being alone with her soon after their arrival, and then it all came out. She sat by her side on a sofa with her head on her shoulder.

"It's lovely to see you so happy, darling," she said, more tenderly than she was wont to speak. "I think Maurice is a real dear, and you've improved him enormously already."

Caroline laughed. Barbara was allowed to say these things. "He's improved me," she said.

"No, he couldn't do that, darling," said Barbara caressingly. "You're perfect as it is. How I do wish I was coming home with you. I did ask Daddy, and he wouldn't let me. I hate being kept here, and I've learnt all the French I want to learn. I'm perfectly miserable here."

"Why, darling?" asked Caroline. "You were happy enough here before, and it won't be long now before you're at home for good."

"I don't think I shall be much wanted when I do come home," she said forlornly.

Caroline protested warmly against this statement. "You're the only one of us left at home now to look after Daddy," she ended. "Of course I shall see him a lot, but I can't be as much with him as you can."

Barbara began to cry. She was not given to tears, and hated to have them commented upon when she did give way. She cried softly on Caroline's shoulder. "I thought Dad would want me when you and B had gone," she said. "I wanted to begin at once, to be

a lot to him. Of course he loves me, but he doesn't want me as he did you and B."

Caroline saw that there was something behind this. "Tell me about it, darling," she said softly.

"I believe he'll marry Ella," she blurted out. "She began to worm herself in the moment you had left. And it's going on now. That's what makes me so unhappy, being away."

Caroline was too surprised for the moment to say anything. An uneasy feeling came over her that she had been too immersed in her own happiness to have cared much what was happening to those others whom she loved.

Barbara went on. "He writes to me regularly," she said, "as he has always done. But his letters are full of her. She always seem to be there, whenever he comes down; or he goes over to Surley. He stayed there from Friday till Tuesday last week, instead of going home. He says that she has done a lot to make up to him for not having us. That's how she does it, I suppose. I never liked her as much as the rest of you did, and now she's showing what she is."

Caroline put this aside for the time. Her mind was working. "I asked her to look after Daddy when I went away," she said. "She has written to me about him, and I've been glad. I never thought what you think, darling. She has been almost like one of us. I don't think she can possibly think of him in that way, or he of her. There has been nothing in the letters of either of them to show it."

"Well, he doesn't want me, anyhow," said Barbara. "Perhaps I'm jealous, but if there *were* nothing else I don't see why she should put herself in my place."

"Poor old pet!" said Caroline, kissing her. "Daddy couldn't get you back again directly after you had come over here, to finish up. When you do get home you'll be just as much to him as B and I have been. You know he loves you just as much, but we are older and—"

"Oh, I'm not grumbling about that. He has always been perfectly sweet to me, and he hasn't realised that I'm no longer a child, any more than you did up to a little time ago. But I was so looking forward to taking your and B's place with him—I know I couldn't do it as well, but I should have tried—and now *she* comes in to spoil it all. I hate her."

"Why do you hate her, darling? Why have you never liked her as we have?"

"I don't know. It's just that I haven't. Perhaps a little because she has tried to make me. I didn't exactly hold out, but somehow I couldn't. I suppose I knew all the time that *this* was in her."

"Well, Barbara, darling, I don't think it's as you say; but supposing it were! We ought not to set ourselves against it, ought we?"

"What, our own Daddy! I think it would be horrible."

"Why, darling?"

She did not say why, but repeated that it would be horrible.

Caroline was at a loss. "I don't know why you don't like Ella," she said slowly. "You *are* good at judging of people, I know—better than I am—but I think that I should have found it out by this time if there had been anything that one ought not to like in her. I can't see it if there is. I think I love her next best after the family. I do love her."

"Would you love her if you thought she wanted to marry Dad?"

"Yes, I think perhaps I should love her all the more, though just at first perhaps I shouldn't like it—I mean I shouldn't like *anybody* to marry him. It's difficult to say, before anything has happened; and I believe you are making a mistake too. But supposing she did, it *could* only be because she really loved him. She has had plenty of offers of marriage."

"So she says."

"Oh, Barbara, darling! That's silly. She *is* beautiful, and clever, and nice too. Even if you don't agree entirely with the rest of us in liking her, we all do like her. And I don't think even you have *not* liked her really, though you think now you haven't."

"Well, go on."

"How am I to go on? Don't you agree that she wouldn't marry him unless she loved him?"

"Oh, I suppose so; but it would be a silly sort of love, when he's so much older than she is."

"Isn't that rather reflecting on him? Women do marry men a lot older than themselves, and love them

devotedly. I'm sure darling Dad is worth any woman's love. He's so kind, and understanding. And he's very good-looking too, and not even elderly, as many men of his age are."

"I can't imagine him falling in love, especially with somebody like her, who has been almost like we have to him."

"Well, that's what makes it difficult to talk about. Perhaps he wouldn't. I can't take it for granted you are right. One can only look at it in a general sort of way; and if it did happen I don't think there would be anything out of the way in it—certainly nothing *horrible*, as you say."

Barbara's tears flowed again. "I suppose it's I who am rather horrid," she said. "I should be if there wasn't anything in it at all. But I'm almost certain there is, or I shouldn't have thought about it. Did you know that the moment you went away she went out for a walk with him?"

"Yes, she told me that, and that he was feeling frightfully depressed at losing me, and she hoped she had cheered him up. If that's all, Barbara, darling, I think you are making a great deal out of a very little. I asked her to look after him, myself. Of course I didn't mean any more than to be as she always has been."

"I think you might have asked me to do that. I wanted to."

Caroline was stricken with compunction. "Oh, darling," she said, "I knew you would. I'd no idea of her

taking your place. I know how glad he will be to have you back. And I'm going home now. I shall look after him myself."

"Will you write and tell me what is happening?"

"Of course I will. Everything."

"If *that* is happening, shall you try to stop it?"

"What could I do to stop it?" she asked, after a pause.

"You might remind Daddy that all his daughters haven't gone away from him yet. And Caroline, I wish you'd just say something—from yourself, I mean—about me being older, and that you liked having me to talk to and tell things to, after B was married. You did, you know, in the summer holidays. Daddy might see it if you said it about me—that I *could* be a lot to him, I mean, if he wanted me. Of course you'd have to do it carefully."

Caroline promised to do this, and left Barbara two days later, somewhat comforted, but still rebellious at her exile, at this particular time.

She had given Caroline a good deal to think about. She confided Barbara's fears to Maurice, who expressed himself incredulous. But on such a subject as this he was not much of a guide. His training had not prepared him for judging of a man considerably older than himself, as one who had lived more in the world might have done. Grafton was Caroline's father. He could treat him with respect, and with affection, but hardly as having any of the qualities of youth remaining in him. He thought it very delightful that his

family should treat him in the companionable way they did, which was different from any way of parents and children of which he had had experience; but he was still apt to be surprised at certain manifestations of their attitude towards him. Caroline felt all the time that it was even more difficult for him than it was for her to envisage her father as a man who might still desire for himself what belonged by right to youth. It was only difficult for her because he was her father. She had to think of him from outside herself, and she had plenty of experience to guide her in seeing him as a man who might legitimately look for a further period of happiness in marriage, and as quite capable of gaining the love and devotion of a woman much younger than himself, and of keeping it.

"I do want him to be happy," she said, "and in his own way. Of course it would mean that he would give to her a great deal of what we have all had, and that's why poor little Barbara hates it so. But after all it is just what has happened with us—with B and me, and will happen by and bye with Barbara. He isn't less to us than he was, but he's no longer everything. We shouldn't be less to him."

"I think you would," said Maurice. "It isn't quite the same."

The idea still shocked him a little, and for the first time he was unwilling to express all his thoughts to Caroline, for they would seem to reflect upon her father. His simplicity and singleness of purpose went along with some rigidity of mind and outlook. Life pre-

sented itself to him in elementary forms, and his ideas, born partly from his very limited experience, had not yet fully expanded under the influence of the great change that had come to himself. It was a man's right course to find his work in the world and to give himself up to it. All the rest would be added in due season, and he must not step out of his path to seek it for himself. He had lately learned that work can have a consecration that will lift it to a still higher plane of rightness; but that discovery had only settled his convictions. He did not think of Grafton as a man who had ever put his work in its proper place. He had seen him only enjoying the fruits of it, and depending upon those fruits for most of his contentment in life. He might not acknowledge it, even to himself, of Caroline's father, and certainly he would not have acknowledged it to her, but his tendency was to regard a man to whom life came so easily as it did to Grafton as liable to be weakened in fibre. He might take to himself gratifications that did not legitimately belong to him. In some respects the conventions of youth are more binding than those of age. Maurice would not have been disturbed at the idea of his father-in-law married again, to a lady of ripe age. He could not accustom himself to the idea of his falling in love at the age of fifty-one, and hoped that Barbara's fears would prove to be unfounded.

They went home by way of Havre and Southampton, and reached Abington without going to London. The Abbey was empty. Miss Waterhouse was away visit-

ing, and Grafton was tied to the Bank that week. He was to stay at Stone Cottage over the week-end and Caroline made the most loving preparations for his reception.

Her happiness, but for the cloud brought by Barbara's fears, which try as she would she could not treat otherwise than as a cloud, was complete. The cottage, which had been renovated for them throughout, was as charming a little house as any newly married couple could wish to inhabit. Her father had offered to enlarge it for her, but she had wanted to run it on a modest scale, with only one servant, and as the wife of a poor man to do a great deal in it herself. Electric light had been installed, and a sumptuously fitted bathroom. Otherwise, except for its new paint and papers, it was as Mollie Pemberton and her mother had made themselves happy in.

Caroline had had her way with all the furnishing and arrangements of the Abbey when they had come to live there, but her zest for her very own little house was in no way diminished. It was almost too full of wedding presents, many of which would have been more suitable for the wife of a rich man than of a poor one. But Caroline had a genius for making a room. Mollie Pemberton opened her eyes when she saw what she had done with Stone Cottage.

Mollie and her husband, the Prescotts, Worthing, and Ella Carruthers, all came to see her on the day of her arrival, or the day after, and all helped her to get into order. She thought she must know from

Ella's manner if what Barbara dreaded had come to pass, or was coming to pass. But she could tell nothing. Ella was just the same to her as ever, and showed herself delighted and excited at having her back. She seemed to have nothing to hide, and talked about Grafton with the frank affection that she had always exhibited towards him. If Caroline had not seen Barbara, no idea of any change would have come to her.

And yet she was not sure that Barbara was not right.

On the third morning she went to the Abbey to fetch some things for her father, who was coming down that evening.

It was rather sad to see it deserted, by all except the servants. But she did not feel sad on her own account. She now stood outside it, and the life it represented. She went through the large and beautiful rooms, so different from those in which her own life was to be spent, and asked herself whether she would regret anything that she had given up to marry Maurice. She could not find in herself the least desire to inhabit such a house again, even with him. She had immensely enjoyed coming to it, and dealing with it, but those enjoyments seemed now to have belonged to a different person. She had taken naturally the good things that had come to her through wealth, and found pleasure in them; but she wanted them no longer. She had something much better. Her happiness, as she went through the house, and into the gardens, was singing in her. The house and the gardens themselves had

given her happiness, but it was nothing to this new-found happiness, and they spoke to her scarcely at all now for herself. She was thinking all the time of her own little house in the village.

Not quite all the time. Her thoughts were much occupied with her father. The empty house, which for some time he would have to inhabit alone, or with the companionship of guests instead of that of his children who had surrounded him with love and affection, brought home to her fully for the first time what he had lost. If the light of the house had gone out for her, it had gone out for him also. But she had her home and her centre of love elsewhere.

She thought of the mother whom she had known and loved as a child, and still loved, as she knew he did. If she had been alive he would not thus have come to the end of most of what had made his home dear to him. She wondered what it would have felt like to come home from her honeymoon and find her mother waiting for her. Her old home would not have lost so much of its meaning if she had been there. But she did not think much about herself except to ask what she could do to make up to her father for his loss.

She thought, rather sadly on his behalf, that the very perfection of their family life must make the change worse for him. She would be much with him when he came down to Abington, but not the constant companion she had been hitherto. He had done hardly anything there without her, and she had devoted herself to him as now she would devote herself to her hus-

band. She had gained immeasurably, and a great part of her gain was his loss. She knew that she had been more to him than any of the others, and that he had come more and more to depend upon her. She had loved him to come to her with any new idea or discovery, which would have lost half its value to him unless they had shared it. His letters since her marriage had been full of little jokes and felicities to which he had wanted her response; and she had always given it, but with the knowledge that it was no longer to him that she would take her own little discoveries and appreciations, and that he might sooner or later, unless she was very careful, be saddened by the change in her. He would never claim more than his right, but the change would be there, of necessity, and the loss to him.

Ought she not to be glad if he had found some one in whom his affections and home-loving desires could centre themselves again—some one who would give him back the devotion that he so richly deserved. It was natural that poor little Barbara should think that her turn had come to be his chosen companion, and resent the intrusion of another into the place she was so touchingly anxious to fill. But Barbara could not be expected to realise that her part would probably only be played for a few years at the most, and that when she left home the change would fall upon him still more heavily. And by that time his chance of winning for himself what he might want would be less. Perhaps it would have disappeared altogether. Caroline

thought that her father would not deliberately set himself to choose a wife with whom he might be happy. But if a woman so beautiful and so suited to him in mind as Ella were to show him now that she loved him well enough to marry him—surely his children who loved him should do nothing to dim the happiness that might be his!

And yet she was not quite happy about it.

CHAPTER XXI

A VISIT

PREPARATIONS for her father's visit were a serious affair with Caroline, and with Maurice too, for he saw how much it meant to her, and loved every manifestation of her personality.

At the same time he was a little nervous about it all. There seemed to him such an immense difference between the way of living which was natural to himself, and that which Caroline took for granted, even in this modest home of theirs. All the beautiful furnishing and appointments, as perfect on their smaller scale as those to be found at the Abbey, he took pleasure in as the right setting for Caroline, and as giving her pleasure; but they said nothing to him apart from her, and he found them even a little irksome. They marked the difference between him and her, and, especially in the light of her careful and loving preparations, between him and her father.

Grafton was not a man to whom creature comforts were all in all. He could have roughed it if necessary, even at his age, as well as Maurice himself. But it seemed to Maurice that he needed as much attention and cossetting as a woman. His bedroom was arranged so that he should miss nothing of what he was accustomed to—his personal belongings brought down

from the Abbey, his bedside table furnished with carefully shaded light, books, cigarettes, matches, ash-tray. His own servant was to be in waiting for him when he came, to deal with his clothes, and again in the morning, when he was to have his tea at the early hour he affected. There were the soaps and salts he liked in the bathroom, and the bath sheet was to be warmed and sent up at exactly the right time. Meals were a subject of earnest discussion between Caroline and her maid, and immense care was to be taken in preparing them. He had stocked their tiny cellar himself, and old Jarvis was called in to decide upon the question of wines and *liqueurs*, Maurice being entirely ignorant on such subjects. And Jarvis was to wait at table. The maid, though a treasure, could not do justice to the occasion.

In as far as all this meant that Caroline was displaying the charming desire of a young housewife to acquit herself well, and to do honour to one whom she loved, he could sympathise with her. But he did not see that it meant that almost entirely, and put a good deal of it down to the exigencies of a rich man, which Caroline had rather wasted herself hitherto in satisfying.

He was in process of adjusting himself all round. He would not have believed beforehand that so many of the ways of a large house could have been imported into a small one, run with one servant, as were surrounding him in Stone Cottage. They would not always live exactly as they were going to live during the few days of Grafton's visit. But the life to which they

were already settling down was far more elaborate than any he had ever lived before, even in Worthing's bachelor establishment, which was run on more elaborate lines than those of his father's vicarage.

Caroline busied herself greatly about the house, doing much of the work in the rooms, and even in the kitchen, herself. But that was when he was out. Whenever he saw her she was no more occupied with such work than she had been at the Abbey. She would be in her drawing-room, having changed her clothes, ready to give him his tea when he came home, and she would keep him bright company afterwards. Then she would dress for dinner, and of course it was taken for granted that he would dress, too. The little dinner would be perfect, and the invaluable maid would serve it in such fashion that it was difficult to think of her as having also cooked it. Then after their coffee they would go into the drawing-room, where it seemed profanation for Maurice to smoke a pipe. So, though Caroline encouraged him to do so, he was preparing himself to knock it off altogether, and content himself with a cigarette after dinner until later in the evening.

To a man brought up to this way of living it would have been a miracle of happiness to have had it all so cleverly provided for him by the young wife who was anxious that he should miss nothing of what he had been used to. The little parlour, beautifully furnished as it was, was not a lady's boudoir, in which a man could not feel himself at home. There was a big easy chair, books, and magazines, arrangements for writ-

ing. But though the whole house and all its arrangements were to Caroline the last word in simplicity and economy, it was complicated luxury to him, of a sort that he could only adopt as his ordinary mode of life for her sake. It was not he who had gained it for her, or he might have taken more pride in it. As against this it was part of her, who was so much more delicately nurtured than himself, and the fit setting for her delicate charm, which he, as much as any of those who considered it ill-allied with his outward absence of charm and delicacy, thought of as setting her above him. So he was happy in adapting himself to what meant restraint and careful watchfulness to him. In all essentials her desires were as simple and unenvious as his. He knew that if their lot had been cast in a new country, where she would have had few or none of the refinements that she had always lived with, she would have made nothing of doing without them, and would have worked for him as he would have worked for her. She should never guess, if he could help it, that this sophisticated life was uncongenial to him. He had her, as his constant delight and treasure, and what did anything else matter?

Caroline went to the station alone to meet her father. Maurice had work to finish at the office, or said he had. He thought that Grafton would like to have her to himself alone at their first meeting. He was full of these little delicacies of mind, and of thoughtfulness for others. And her tenderness for her father had awakened an echo of it in himself. He had been so generous

to him, giving him this priceless gift, which he had done so little to deserve, and losing so much in the giving of it. He was anxious to please him, and efface himself in doing so. There was not much he could do to show him gratitude. But she could do a great deal.

Only, if Grafton were preparing to transfer the centre of his affections from the hearts that had hitherto held it, Maurice would not look upon him with quite the same eyes.

He thought about it as he sat at his table in the office, not very busy with the work that he had given himself to do. He could not yet get used to the idea, try as he would. He thought that it was troubling Caroline, though she was preparing herself to welcome it if it should happen. It disturbed him somewhat that there was already a subject upon which they could not talk together with the freedom which it was their joy to use in everything. But to express all his thoughts would be to criticise her father, and he would not do that. In the sanguine spirit of youth, he hoped that this visit would prove that the fear was unfounded, and returned to his work.

In the meantime Caroline, driving to the station, was wondering what Maurice really thought of it, for she knew well enough that he had not told her all his thoughts. He might just as well have done so, for she divined the course they took, and was only ignorant of the strength of his antagonism to the idea. In this, as in smaller matters, she had to distinguish between ideas of his which arose from his true and right attitude to

the basic facts of life and conduct, and those prompted by his limited experience. In all essentials she respected his judgment as that of no other man. But in some non-essentials she knew that her own opinion was of more value than his, and that she could influence him. Was this question of her father's marriage one in which she ought to take his view, or be guided by her own wider experience, and influence him towards hers? She was divided between loyalty to her father and loyalty to her husband, but for the present she no more than he was able to solve the problem. She put it from her mind, and gave herself up to pleasure in the prospect of seeing her father again.

But even this pleasure was slightly tinged with doubt. Two strands were interwoven in her love for her father. Of late years he had been so much her preferred companion, and her position in his household had been such, that there had come about a sense of equality more than exists commonly between father and daughter. It was the spirit of companionship that in its fullest measure she had transferred to Maurice, and its transference had thrown into relief again the filial relationship, which had been strengthened by the quality of the love her father had shown towards her over her marriage. He had effaced himself. There had been no flaw in his tender paternal care for her welfare and happiness. Her grateful devotion to him was stronger than ever, but it flowed towards his father-hood in a fuller degree than of late years. She recognised this change in her and thought that the idea of his marriage to one

who had shared with her the happy associations that were not wholly filial would not have perplexed her as it did now if it had arisen a year before. She was not so far from Maurice in her emotions towards it as either of them thought.

But the doubts were all swept away when they met. He was her father, loving and overjoyed to see her again, and apparently as excited at the prospect of playing guest to her hostess as she was.

She had hardly ever seen him in higher spirits than during their drive home together. They laughed together all the time, and she felt the bond between them to be as strong as ever.

Her cup of happiness was full when they reached home and his pleasure showered itself over her husband as well as herself. His greeting of Maurice was of the warmest, and without an atom of constraint. She knew that he had had a struggle with himself to accept him for her sake, and what valiant effort he had made to conceal it. But she felt now at last that the need of effort on his part no longer existed. Maurice was a son to him, at least as much as Dick was. In fact he showed more affection towards him than he habitually showed towards Dick, putting his hand on his shoulder as they stood together for a minute before the fire in the parlour, and chaffing him and Caroline together as two children absurdly but thrillingly placed in a position of responsibility.

When he had been conducted to his room, where Jarvis had made all ready for him to dress for dinner,

and Caroline had changed the position of some things on his dressing-table, and Maurice had poked the fire, before withdrawing, they smiled happily at one another. "It's jolly to have him here," said Maurice. "And he is so pleased to see you again."

"You too, darling," said Caroline. "He's awfully sweet to both of us."

"I'm pleased enough to see him," said Maurice. "There's nobody in the world I'd rather have here. He's awfully pleased about Beatrix too."

Grafton had told Caroline on their way home that Beatrix was expecting a child, and a letter from her to Caroline had come by the evening post. They talked about it at intervals during the evening. Caroline laughed at the idea of his becoming a grandfather, but in her slightly altered attitude towards him the relationship seemed more fitting to him than it would have done before. There was no doubt about his pleasure in it.

Ella's name was mentioned, quite naturally by him. "She's been a great consolation to me while you've been away," he said. "Sometimes I haven't missed you in the least, darling. She has been quite like one of the family."

Would he have said this if he had been thinking of giving her the chief place in the family? Maurice thought not, when he and Caroline talked it all over at the end of the evening. His own fears, he told her, were at an end. Her father had allowed Ella to console him for the loss of his daughters, because she

had been more like them than anybody else. But it was them he really wanted. Now Caroline had come home that was plain enough to be seen.

Caroline was inclined to think as he did. Her father's high spirits and his obvious pleasure in having her back had made everything just perfect, and the way that he had taken Maurice into it all gave her the idea that he was happier in her new happiness than if he had kept her to himself. Such an attitude relieved her of the uneasy balancing of the claims of husband and father. If his fatherhood could take them both in and sun itself in their happiness, so that the thought of them would always be present with him, there would be much to balance the loss of her companionship to him. He might indeed have almost as much of it as before, since she would always be at Abington when he was there; and to enjoy it with that of Maurice added, so that what had knitted the two of them together would now knit the three, would be a gain all round. It would even heighten her appreciation of her own married happiness, for it would bring Maurice nearer to her in the one big thing in her life that would otherwise tend, however slightly and on the surface, to divide their aims.

She was very happy when she fell asleep, and thought of her dear father lying under her roof, still as near to her as he had ever been. But when she awoke in the night, after realising with some pleasurable emotion that he was there, and not going to sleep again immediately, the doubts began to creep in.

Might not these delightfully high spirits, which she had attributed to his joy in being with her again, and his pleasure in the thought of Beatrix's child coming—might they not have sprung from another source altogether? Ella was coming over to lunch that day, and they were to lunch with her on Sunday. If she was becoming, or had already become, the beloved object, that exhilaration which had made him seem as young as either of them throughout the evening past would be sufficiently accounted for. She knew from her own experience, and from memories of Beatrix, how the joy of loving and being loved effervesces in sparkling merriment, and sheds itself over those who are loved already. It saddened her a little to think that her father's whole-hearted acceptance of Maurice, which had so charmed her that evening, might after all only mean that she herself was no longer of paramount importance to him. His pleasure in their society would remain, but it would not call forth of itself that demonstration of happiness. It would not be they who had caused the years to fall off him.

She could come to no conclusion, except that if he were in the early stage of discovery that he might still love and be loved, it would affect him to just that insurgence of youthful spirit that he had shown throughout the evening.

He was less hilarious in manner the next morning, but still cheerfully content at being where he was. All three of them went down to the Abbey and looked for early flowers in the rock-garden. Then Maurice

went off to his work, and he and Caroline went to see the Prescotts, and after that he wrote a long letter to Beatrix while she busied herself with preparations for luncheon.

Ella came, and there was a revival of the high spirits; but all of them shared in it. There was nothing that there had not been scores of times before, when she had been with them and they had all made merry together. Nothing to indicate either in him or in her that the affectionate terms they had always been on now hid something deeper. The affection on either side expressed itself plainly enough, and to an outsider would certainly have seemed to indicate an unusual attraction; but it was what they had gradually come to. She had been given the affection of the family, his no less than theirs, and returned it.

Caroline wrote a long letter to Barbara, when he had gone back to London. "Really, darling, I think you are wrong. She does love him, just as all of us do, and he is awfully sweet to her, as he is to us. It has always been the same, and we have been glad of it. If you had not put it into my head that there might be something more, I should only have felt pleased that she had been able to console him for us all being away. Perhaps I haven't been *quite* certain, but I do think that if it had been as you think I should have known it. For one thing I think he would have wanted to be alone with her sometimes, and perhaps she with him, if it were *she* who wanted it, as you seemed to think. But neither of them ever showed any wish at all to be

by themselves, even for a minute or two. It was all of us being happy and merry together, as it has always been. And what makes me feel more than anything that it can't be is that darling Dad seems older at the same time that he seems younger. He has been simply adorable to Maurice and me, and Maurice loves him almost as much as I do. And he is in a heaven of delight about precious B, and is going to rush off to her this afternoon the moment he can get away from the Bank. I can't help thinking that if he had it in his mind to begin all over again, for himself, with somebody so much younger, he wouldn't be *quite* so pleased at the idea of being a grandfather.

"And he was awfully sweet about you too, darling. He made me tell him *everything* about you, and kept on asking questions about you. He does love you awfully, and it will be splendid when you come home, and can look after him, and make him happy, as B and I have tried to do."

Barbara's fears were not allayed by this letter. "*He* hasn't said he wants me home," she remarked to herself. "If he had, she'd have said so. I should only be in the way."

Caroline went up to London for a day's shopping that week. She lunched with Lady Grafton, and her father came to meet her, but had to leave immediately afterwards.

"The dear man!" said Lady Grafton. "I've never seen him so pleased with himself. It has given him a

new lease of life. If it weren't for his hair you might take him to be about thirty."

They had been talking about Beatrix, and Caroline thought she referred to that. "He'll love being a grandfather," she said. "He'll be like he was to us when we were children, with B's baby."

"Let's hope he'll have babies of his own," said Lady Grafton uncompromisingly. "Most men wouldn't care about it at his age; but he will. He'll dote on them."

Caroline was taken back. Those possibilities had been absent from her mind, though Ella's name had been mentioned more than once. "What *do* you mean?" she asked.

"Oh, my dear, you can't be as blind as all that. When did you ever see a man in the state he's in unless he was in love, and things were going well with him?"

Caroline was silent.

"*Haven't* you seen anything?" Lady Grafton asked.

"You mean with Ella?"

"That shows you have. You ought not to be jealous and selfish about it, you know. He hasn't been to you. He behaved extraordinarily well over *your* marriage."

"I know he did," said Caroline quickly. She wanted no enlightenment of her aunt's opinions upon her marriage. "I shouldn't be jealous or selfish if he wanted that to make him happy. But I don't think he does."

"It's what *would* make him happy, isn't it? She's

a very charming creature, and she's devoted to him. She'd give him all the sort of young brightness that he's had from you, and a lot more besides. I don't say you *are* selfish. You never have been. But he isn't everything to you any longer, and you can't be everything to him, though I know you'll be everything you can. You ought to be glad that there's somebody who can step in and fill your place."

"Dear Aunt Mary, I think I should be, if I thought it was likely to happen. But you wouldn't expect me not to feel just a little sad that we shouldn't be everything to him any longer, as you say."

This was what Lady Grafton wanted. She did not like Caroline's marriage, and if her affection for her niece prevented her saying so, she was yet in the state of finding relief by being a little hard on her.

"That's only jealousy," she said. "And at bottom it's the jealousy of the young towards those they look upon as elderly. The fact is that George ought to have married again while he was still a young man. Almost any woman would have been glad enough to have him, and with the right sort of woman he'd have been a husband in a thousand. He was, as long as it lasted. He didn't marry again because he devoted himself to all of you instead, and as long as *that* lasted he had all he wanted, though not as much as he might have had. Now he's lost it. B hardly thinks of him at all, except when she's with him, and of course he's nothing to you beside your husband. I don't blame you for that. It's natural enough, especially when

you're first married. But he loses it all the same."

"I don't believe he feels that he's lost it. Maurice is almost as devoted to him as I am."

Lady Grafton refrained from saying: "So he ought to be," and said instead: "I'm glad to hear that," but in a tone that made Caroline regret that she had brought his name in. Of course Aunt Mary was incapable of understanding what she and Maurice together might be to her father. "I do love him," she said, "as much as ever; even more, I think, because he's been so good to me. I don't believe anybody in the world loves their father more than I do. It doesn't make me love him less because I love my husband. He knows that."

"Oh, my dear, we're not talking about all that. You've given him the love of a daughter; so has B, though she hasn't been as careful about it as you have. It was enough for him as long as you were all with him. Now you can no longer be with him it isn't good enough for him, though no doubt it will always count for a good deal. He wants the love and attention in his home, and he has a right to it if he can get it. What you want to do is to keep him tied down to his position as a father, and a grandfather. You can't see that other people may look upon him in quite a different light. He's an unusually attractive man, and extraordinarily well preserved. *You've* all had something to do with keeping him young, and I've always said so. It isn't every woman, or even every girl, who falls in love with callow youth."

Caroline had something of her father's equability under attack. "I suppose that's a hit at me," she said with a smile. "I shouldn't be surprised, you know, at anybody falling in love with Dad. I know what a darling he is. But I'm not going to take blame to myself for thinking of him more as a father, or even as a grandfather. Do you think Ella loves him in that way? I know she *does* love him. You've seen her, haven't you, since I've been away?"

"Yes, I've seen her. What I think is that they're both of them absolutely ready for it. But they *might* be held back, and a great chance of happiness for both of them lost, by doubts of how *you* would take it. Now I shan't say any more. You'd better think it over."

CHAPTER XXII

THE FAMILY VIEW

DICK went off on a cruise, and Beatrix came to stay at Abington. She came for a few days to Caroline, and then moved down to the Abbey to be with her father when he came home at the end of the week.

Caroline thought her more lovely than ever. She was radiantly happy at the thought of her child coming, but rather quieter than she had been wont to be, though at times she showed all her exuberant high spirits.

She and Maurice got on very well together, but Caroline knew, and he also probably knew, that she did not take much interest in him. She was bright and friendly with him when he was there, but when he wasn't she seldom mentioned him. But she clung to Caroline. She *had* to come to her, she told her. Even if Dick hadn't been obliged to go off, she would have left him and come. Or perhaps she would have asked Caroline to come to her. Here she laughed. "I'm more in love with him than ever," she said, "and I can't bear to be parted from him. But I want you too, darling, awfully. I do miss you, and I wish we lived nearer to each other."

So she would have flown to her mother at this time. Caroline felt very tenderly towards her. She was such

a child, in spite of her approaching motherhood. Maurice was touched, too, by her dependence upon Caroline. Caroline told her some of the things he had said about her, and she said: "He's an awful dear, Cara," and then went on to talk about Dick.

They talked a great deal also of their father. Beatrix was inclined to Lady Grafton's views, which had been imparted to her as well as to Caroline. "The idea was rather a shock at first," she said. "But when I came to think it over I thought it would be rather hard lines on the old darling not to be pleased about it, if it happens. He's not so *frightfully* much older than Dick. If Dick had been married at eighteen, as one of his shipmates was, we were reckoning it out that he might have a daughter of fourteen now, and she'd only be two years younger than Bunting."

Caroline laughed. "I don't quite see what that has to do with it," she said.

"Oh, I do. What I mean is that because he's our dear old Daddy, we don't think of him as somebody who ought to be falling in love at his time of life. But I don't see why he shouldn't. And he's a million times better-looking than heaps of young men. If he were on the stage lots of silly girls would be in love with him."

Caroline laughed again. "I've got over all that feeling, if I ever had it," she said. "And Ella has been married before. She has been like a girl with us, but she's older in a great many ways. I suppose it would be suitable enough."

"Oh, I think so. And it would be more fun for the old darling to marry somebody he was in love with, than just to marry again—somebody like the Dragon, perhaps—just because *we* have got married and he feels rather lonely. Aunt Mary says that it isn't fair to expect him just to sit down by himself and think of us and our babies. He has as much life in him as anybody else, and he has given us the best part of it. Now we've left him he ought to have a chance on his own account. I don't look at it quite like that, but—"

"I'm sure *he* doesn't," Caroline interrupted her. "He has been the dearest father to us that anybody could have had, but we have made him happy, too. It isn't as if he had sacrificed himself."

"That's what I told her, and she said the sacrifice would begin now, if we didn't do all we could to help this on. What *does* Ella think about it, Cara? You ought to have found out by this time. I'm not sure I shan't ask her when I see her."

"You won't want to when you do see her. She is just the same—towards him and towards us. I think she always will be. That's why I sometimes think that it would be rather nice if it did happen—nice for us, I mean, as well as for Dad."

"That's what I have come to think, too, with Aunt Mary to assist me. What she says is that if there were a question of his marrying somebody of what would be called a suitable age we should probably be glad of it, as we shouldn't have to bother ourselves about Dad

when we simply wanted to be selfish with our own homes and husbands."

"Yes, that's the sort of thing that Aunt Mary *would* say."

"But what we really object to is his having the sort of happiness we have got for ourselves. Because he wouldn't get any of it from *us*."

"There is generally a spice of truth in Aunt Mary's sharp speeches, which is worth looking out for. You haven't told me what Dick says about it."

"Oh, Dick takes the man's point of view, of course. Man remains a lovable creature till he's about seventy, or eighty or ninety. A woman has to leave off expecting to be loved when she's about thirty. He says Dad is as young as anybody, and he can't see what all the fuss is about."

"I don't know that there is any fuss. Except with poor darling Barbara. She hates it."

"Poor lamb! Of course she was looking forward to having her innings, with both of us married."

"She has never liked Ella as much as we have."

"I haven't noticed much difference. Of course she's jealous of her now. But that would calm down. I *should* like Dad to have some more children. He'd be awfully sweet to them. Fancy! They'd be younger than mine."

Beatrix then went on to talk about her baby that was coming.

Barbara wrote to Bunting. He was to tell her what he thought. She should not object, she added, to hear

Jimmy's view on the subject. Bunting was to tell Jimmy that she had thought over all he had said to her, and beyond a slight interest in a man who gave tickets for umbrellas at the Luxembourg Gallery, which she had subdued, she had behaved exactly as he would have wished since she had been back in Paris.

Young George imparted this piece of information first, as he and Jimmy took a Sunday afternoon walk together. "She did have you on," he said. "You have to keep your eyes skinned when Barbara begins to pull your leg."

"I can't say I care for that sort of thing much myself," said Jimmy. "Still, you must take people as you find them. If Barbara finds it amusing to play the fool in that way, I don't much mind. She is growing up into a very nice sort of girl and one can forgive her a few antics. I say, George, I shall have Feltham some day, and be fairly well off, I suppose. I don't suppose your Governor would object, would he, if anything were to come of it between Barbara and me?"

"Anything were to come of what?" asked Bunting.

"Oh, well, I should have thought you could have seen that Barbara is a good deal more to me than other girls. Of course I chaff her, and treat her in some ways as a kid, but—"

"I should have thought that was how she treated you."

"Well, it's our way of treating each other. I don't

suppose she thinks of me as a kid any more than I do of her. I don't go as far as to say that she's gone on me, or anything of that sort. She's too young at present to be gone on anybody, however much she may lark and rot about it. And I haven't done anything to make her yet. I'm only asking you, *supposing* it took me that way, and I was serious about it, I might be the sort of fellow your Governor wouldn't mind Barbara marrying?"

"I should think he'd be half off his head with delight," said Young George. "I say, Jimmy, there's something I want to consult you about. Barbara has written to me about it, and she says I can."

"I shall be pleased to give you my advice, George. Her, too, if she wants it. How did she—er—put it—that she wanted it."

"Oh, she said: 'I don't mind your telling that little ass, Jimmy, and see what he thinks,' or something of that sort. She didn't mean anything by it."

"Oh, no. I don't mind. It's the way we treat each other. Well, what's the trouble, old man?"

Young George told him.

"Ah," said Jimmy sapiently. "I've been wondering how long it would be before you tumbled to that. It's the talk of the county."

"Do you mean that, or is it only swank because you always see everything—generally before it happens?"

"My dear chap, I can only tell you your Governor went out for a walk with her the moment after Caroline

had gone away, and fixed it up then. If you don't believe me, ask him."

"Oh, that's rot. Caroline was married over two months ago. If he had fixed it up then we should have known about it by this time."

"They agreed to keep it to themselves for a bit. You'll hear soon enough."

"Did my Governor tell you that, or Ella Carruthers?"

"There's no need to play the ass, George. Everybody knows it's settled. Vera mentioned it in the last letter she wrote to me. Mrs. Carruthers has gone up to London, to be near your Governor. He's working rather hard at present, and can't be at Abington as much as he was."

Young George knew that his father was rather tied to the Bank, as two of his partners were away. Jimmy's knowledge of this fact impressed him. "Is she keen on him?" he asked.

"Thinks about nobody else."

"How can you possibly know that? I wish you'd chuck pretending to be God Almighty, and just be little Jimmy Beckley. Barbara wants to know what we think, and what's really happening."

"Well, she's come to the right quarter then. I haven't said anything before, because I didn't know you'd tumbled to it. But I do know more about it than most. There's a cousin of ours who is dead keen on her, and she won't look at him."

"Who is he?"

"He's Sir John Ambleside—on my mother's side of the family. He's in the Scots Guards, and has just come back from India, where he's been A.D.C. to some Governor fellow. He hasn't got much money, so of course all our lot are rather keen on it, as she's supposed to have a good deal. But, as I say, she won't look at him, because of your Governor."

"Is he young?"

"About thirty. Good-looking chap too. It'd be a good match for both of them. There'd be his title against her money. But there it is. He hasn't got a chance. I'm not sorry for it myself, as I've an idea of nobbling him for Vera. She's getting on—twenty-two next birthday, and it's time she was settled. I'm going to get my people to ask him down at Easter, when I shall be at home and can look after things. I hope it will all be settled with your Governor by that time."

"I don't think Barbara knows it has gone as far as that," said Young George reflectively. "She only says she thinks it may happen, though Caroline doesn't. She won't be pleased when I tell her what you've told me."

"Why not?"

"Oh, well, I suppose she wouldn't be. Now Caroline and B are married she wants to be Number One with the Governor."

"Poor little girl!" said Jimmy tenderly. "I call that rather touching, you know, George. We ought to try and make it up to her, if it does happen—not let

her feel herself out of it. I'm sure I'll do all I can to show her that she's still thought a great deal of."

"I'm sure you will," said Young George. "But you won't find she'll want much of you if she can have the Governor."

"That sort of feeling changes when girls grow up," said Jimmy. "Their Governors don't stand much of a chance when the right chap comes along. I will say for your Governor, though, that he knows how to make himself pleasant to younger people, men as well as girls. There's nobody of his age I like better to have a yarn with. I'm not a bit surprised at a woman like Mrs. Carruthers falling in love with him."

"You think it would be a good thing, then?"

"A good thing? Of course it would be a good thing. Don't you think so yourself?"

"Oh, I don't know. I like her all right. Rather rum to have her as a sort of mother, though."

"Nobody thinks anything of that now-a-days. She'd be more like a sort of sister. I must say *I* shouldn't mind having her about the place, if it was me. She's a very fine woman. I spotted her three seasons ago, when she first began to hunt again after Carruthers died. If I hadn't felt myself a bit tied up with Kate Pemberton then, I think I might have tried to make myself pleasant to her. Well, I always have made myself pleasant to her. I think she likes me all right. If she marries your Governor we shall be pretty near neighbours."

"Well, I hope *you* won't try to cut him out, if he

wants to marry her. I don't quite know what to think about it. I shall tell Barbara that it would be a good thing."

"Yes, I should, if I were you. And you can tell her that I'm all in favour of it, as she has asked what I think."

"Thanks, I will," said Young George. "That ought to settle her mind, if anything can. I say, I haven't told you. B's going to have a baby."

"By Jove!" said Jimmy. "It seems no time since B was almost a kid. Makes you feel you're getting on, that sort of thing, eh? Poor little girl! I suppose she's pleased enough about it though, isn't she? They generally are."

"Oh, yes, she's pleased enough."

"Made up her mind it's going to be a boy, of course."

"Well, she does want it to be a boy. How did you know that?"

"They always want a boy—so that he shall be like hubby, I suppose. B had it pretty bad, you know. Nobody could get a word out of her when she was in love with Dick. That was a good business all round, George. You and I can congratulate ourselves on that."

"Why you and I?"

"Well, you asked my advice about it, didn't you? I told you what I thought. I suppose we had something to do with bringing it off. I wish we'd looked after Caroline a bit more. I don't like to think of a

girl like that married to a chap like Bradby. I take your word for it that he's a good chap in himself, but Caroline is wasted on him all the same. She might have married anybody."

"She didn't want to marry anybody. She wanted to marry him, and it has turned out a great success. You'll say so yourself when you see them together."

"Ah, that's all very well at present. It hasn't had time to wear off yet. It's done now and can't be helped; but you see if she doesn't wish she'd not done it in a few years' time. There'll be B in her jolly country house, with all she can want; and Barbara, perhaps—well, I know a pretty decent country house that she can have by and bye, if she wants to. And Caroline—well, really, you know, it makes you feel rather sick. Poor girl! However, I don't altogether blame her for chucking herself away, if she was in love. I'd do it myself. But I dare say I should live to be sorry for it, if I married beneath me."

CHAPTER XXIII

AN ENGAGEMENT

TOWARDS the end of June Caroline went to London to stay with Beatrix for a day or two. Beatrix had summoned her. She depended a good deal on Caroline now. She had asked Maurice to come, too, but he could not leave his work.

The morning after she had arrived Beatrix came into her room with a letter. Dick had gone off early to his ship. "What *does* this mean? Surely it can't be true!" she said.

The letter was from her father. They were to have dined with him that evening. He was going off to Spain, on banking business, that day. He expected to be in Madrid and Barcelona about a week, and on his way back he should take Barbara to Switzerland for a fortnight or so, and then bring her home. Beatrix was to tell Caroline, and he would write to them from abroad. No time for more now, as he was going off in such a hurry. Then came a postscript. "Have you heard of Ella's engagement? Sir John Ambleside. He's a nice fellow, and just the right age for her. Write and congratulate her."

They stared at one another, utterly surprised. It was four months now since Caroline had come home, and the idea of a marriage between their father and Ella

had been discussed between them. Since then they had come to take it quite for granted. Ella had been in London ever since, except for two week-end visits to Surley, and one to Abington, when there had been so large a party of relations and friends that it had seemed as if the occasion would be chosen to make an announcement. That was a month ago, at Whitsuntide. Neither of them had seen Ella since, and their father had only once been down to Abington.

"Sir John Ambleside," said Caroline. "That's the Beckleys' cousin, that Jimmy told Bunting about. But—"

"Poor old Daddy. He's running away," said Beatrix. "But how beastly of her!"

They tried to adjust their recollections. They had taken it for granted. Had they had reason, or had had they been mistaken all the time?

"Of course, she's never given a hint," said Caroline.

"Oh, my dear! You saw how she was with him at Whitsuntide."

"Not really very different from what she has always been. Perhaps gayer, and rather more at home. At least we thought so."

"I'm sure the poor old darling was in love with her. He was as happy as a king all that time. I know the signs."

"But nothing happened. Surely, if it had been as we thought they would have got engaged then, or before."

"Perhaps he was waiting until he was quite certain, and this has happened since—her falling in love with that other man. I shan't congratulate her. I think she has behaved very badly. *Poor* old Daddy! It's frightfully rough luck on him."

"He doesn't want anything said about it, though. I wish he hadn't gone away alone. I'm glad he's going to take Barbara away when he comes back."

"I wish I knew exactly what had happened."

"Perhaps Aunt Mary will have heard something. We shall see her to-day. She will certainly have something to say about it."

They lunched with Lady Grafton, and she had a good deal to say about it. The announcement of the engagement had appeared in the 'Morning Post' that morning, and had taken her by surprise, though she would not admit quite how much it had taken her by surprise.

"He's been dancing after her," she said; "but nobody thought she would accept him. You know I blame you two girls more than anybody."

"Of course you do, darling," said Beatrix. "But we should like to know why, all the same."

"You've stuck up your noses at it. Poor dear George, like most men of his age who are in love, is sensitive to ridicule. He never could bring himself up to the point of proposing because he was afraid that he'd look like a fool. That party at the Abbey was the greatest possible mistake. I said so at the time."

"Who did you say it to, darling?" asked Beatrix.

"You told me that it was the very thing to bring it on. But I suppose you thought I was in a delicate state and must be humoured."

"Yes, it's all very well to treat it like that," said Lady Grafton. "But if it hadn't been for you it would certainly have been brought to a point then. They were both ready for it, and Ella Carruthers knew perfectly well that she had been asked down there to be proposed to. It was you and Caroline who stopped it, and I'm exceedingly annoyed with you, though I try not to show it."

"You don't try very hard, dear," said Caroline. "We expected it, too, and if we weren't quite ready for it at first we had got quite used to it by that time."

"We both showed it, too," said Beatrix. "We were as sweet to Ella as only we know how to be; and we took a great deal of pains to show darling Daddy that we were pleased with him. He knew that we knew all right, and were only waiting."

"Yes, and how did you show it? By hanging round him the whole time, and petting him as if you were children, instead of—"

"Instead of great girls of twenty-one and twenty-two," suggested Beatrix. "That's how we always have treated him, and always shall."

"Two married women," proceeded Lady Grafton.

"And one of them soon to become a mother," added Beatrix.

"Nobody was ever allowed to forget *that*," retorted Lady Grafton. "It was crammed down Ella's throat

that she would be a step-grandmamma, and George could never move anywhere without you flopping about him and calling him 'Daddy darling.' There wasn't much 'Daddy darling' when you fell fatuously in love, and treated him as if he counted for about as much as old Jarvis. Then there was Caroline—"

"Oh, it's my turn now," said Caroline.

"Yes, you were almost as bad. You've left his house, but you come up every day to see that his sheets are properly aired, and send out in the middle of dinner to see whether his hot water bottle is filled."

"Oh, Aunt Mary!"

"Well, that's the impression you give everybody. You made him look like an elderly man, when if you'd let him alone he'd have seemed quite like a young one. How would you have liked it yourselves, if you'd been in Ella's place? She's only a year or two older than you. Probably what put her off was that she was afraid you'd be calling her 'Mummy darling!'"

"Oh, it was *she* that was put off!" said Caroline. "You said at first that it was Dad, because we turned up our noses at it."

"I've no patience with you," concluded Lady Grafton, ignoring this.

"No, you don't seem to have much, darling," said Beatrix sweetly. "You're all wrong though. Caroline and I have been talking it over. We think that she was almost ready to marry him then. She behaved to us as if she were. We can't tell you how, but we both felt the same about it. She wanted to know how we

should take it, and we let her know that we should be pleased. We understood each other perfectly, though not a word was said directly."

"I wish *I'd* said a word, directly. It only wanted that. One is afraid of interfering, and then one wakes up to find everything has gone wrong."

"If only you'd interfered with us all a little more, darling, how much happier we should have been," said Beatrix. "What Caroline and I think is that she never could *quite* make up her mind, and he wouldn't say anything till he saw that she had."

"That's how it's supposed to have happened with *you*, isn't it? It isn't every man who expects the woman he's in love with to fall down and cuddle his boots."

"Don't be tart, darling. It doesn't suit you, really, though you think it does."

"She found out after all that she wanted somebody younger," said Caroline.

"Yes, that's what *you'd* think. The truth of it is you've both been scratching each other's backs. 'Of course he'd want what Dick wanted in you, *darling*,' and 'Of course she'd want somebody more like Maurice, *dearie*.' To any sensible woman George is worth Dick and Maurice put together. Well, I don't know what has happened. I think she would have had him a month ago, if he'd asked her. I've hardly seen her since. At any rate, it's all over. George won't marry now. This was the only chance. He wouldn't marry for the sake of marrying, and he wouldn't go about

looking for somebody to fall in love with. You've stopped his doing either, till it's too late. But with somebody provided for him, so to speak, who would just suit him, and could make him fall in love with her into the bargain—it would have been simply ideal. Now the poor man has got to fly off and forget all about it. Of course he won't forget all about it for a long time. He'll feel himself old all of a sudden, and know that he'll have to go on getting older for the rest of his life. I'm furious about it."

Caroline and Beatrix went on to see Lady Handsworth. They agreed on the way there that Aunt Mary was really rather sweet about their father, though she always tried to be too clever. It *was* hard lines on the poor old darling, and they would have to do their best to prevent him feeling he was getting old. It seemed that he actually had run away. Uncle James had said that somebody from the Bank was to have been sent to Spain in a day or two, but that he had suddenly announced his intention of going himself, immediately. He had said nothing about the engagement, but he must have known of it when he made his decision, as he had written to Beatrix that afternoon.

Lady Handsworth was concerned about the news. "I did hope that she would have married your father," she said. "But I never felt quite so sure about it as Mary, and others, have. I think she could never quite make up her mind. Sir John Ambleside has been rather determined in his wooing, and I suppose it came

to a point where George held back, not liking to put himself into rivalry with a much younger man."

"I think that's much the most likely thing to have happened," said Caroline. "But he did love her, I'm pretty sure, and I'm most awfully sorry for him."

"So am I," said Lady Handsworth. "But he will get over it, perhaps sooner than one might think. A man of his age never lets himself quite go, unless he's absolutely sure. He knows, for one thing, that life isn't all made up of love, and if he has had a blow he can look forward to the time when he will have left off feeling it. Besides, your father hasn't lost the love that he has always had, and that has been enough for him hitherto."

This was more consoling than Lady Grafton's statement that it was all their fault. Of course he hadn't lost their love; it was stronger than ever, because he would depend upon them more than if Ella had gone to him to fill their place.

"I'm afraid I *was* rather selfish when I found out how much I loved Dick," Beatrix said, when they had left Lady Handsworth. "Dick says I was, himself, and that if I had made a little more fuss with Daddy he wouldn't have wanted to go off loving somebody else. I loved him just the same, but I suppose I didn't think enough that he'd want me to show it. Still, *you* haven't been like that. You're more thoughtful than I am, dearest. I don't think it would have made much difference. I think Aunt Mary was right there. It

was Ella making up to him that led him on—even if she didn't mean to lead him on so far."

"I shall write to her," said Caroline. "He asks us to. He won't want us not to be friends; and I suppose she will still be living at Surley sometimes."

Both of them wrote. Ella's answers were affectionate, but it seemed to them a little shame-faced. She said very little to them about the man she was going to marry, though it would have been natural for her to expatiate upon him to such intimate friends. Her only reference to Grafton was in her letter to Caroline, in which she said: "I told dear Mr. Grafton before anybody, and he was so sweet about it, and has promised me a very handsome wedding present."

Caroline had a letter from Barbara after she went home. Barbara was in a heaven of delight. She had seen her father on his way through Paris, and was preparing to go off with him on his way back.

"How silly I was to bother myself and all of you about Ella," she wrote. "Dad told me she was going to be married to that little ass Jimmy's cousin. Dad was quite pleased about it. He was awfully sweet to me, and says he is longing to have me at home to look after him. It will be spiffing fun going to Switzerland together. The darling old thing wants a holiday. He says he's been working rather hard at the Bank, and he certainly looks rather run down. I shall take the utmost possible care of him. He bought me a hat in the Rue de la Paix. Ser-wish!"

CHAPTER XXIV

BARBARA

BARBARA and her father left Paris one evening and arrived at Montreux the next morning. In the afternoon they climbed up by the electric train to Château d'Oex, where they had spent a happy fortnight five winters before, skating and ski-ing and lugeing. Barbara had been given the choice of a place to go to, and had chosen this. She wanted to see the mountain pastures, which they had known only under snow, in their early summer dress. Grafton did not want to travel about. They were to stay wherever they went to, and perhaps visit a few other places on their homeward way.

The next day Barbara wrote to Caroline.

"Here we are, in the same old rooms, with the same jolly old view, but you've no idea of the difference. There is still snow on the Gummfluh and the Rübli, but only in the clefts and hollows, and all the rest is the most lovely pinks and purples and yellows and heavenly green. All the fields are simply full of flowers, growing with the hay. They say that a month ago they were white with narcissus, but they couldn't have been more beautiful than they are now, with all their colours. Dad and I had a walk this morning across the valley to where we used to ski. It was like walking through a garden, and the river looks topping, all free of ice, and

flowing between the rocks and firs. The cows are feeding half-way up the Cray, and those that are still down here all have great cow-bells. You hear them booming and tinkling all the time. We are going to have a lot of walks, and go up to the chalets where they make the cheeses. The rink is now a tennis court, but the people who play there don't look very interesting and Dad hasn't brought any things so I don't think we shall launch ourselves among them. There aren't many people in the hotel yet—very different from what it was when we were here. But we like it, and are going to be thoroughly lazy, and loll about with books, except when we go for walks.

“Now I've got Dad all to myself, of course I can *see*. I was a fool to write what I did from Paris. The poor old darling had made up his mind to keep it all to himself, and had screwed himself to be extra merry and bright with me, so that I shouldn't twig anything. He did take me in, but I only saw him for a few hours. Of course he can't really hide it, though he thinks he's doing it beautifully, poor lamb! I do believe I'm the proper person to be with him, Cara dear. Perhaps you would do it better, but you can't be here, so I hope you'll be glad that I am, and not think that I only want to enjoy myself, though I am doing that, and it is lovely to be here, and with Dad. It's rather pathetic how he likes to be always with me, and I *know* he is glad that he brought me here. When we were reading on the balcony this afternoon, I could see he wasn't reading much, but every now and then he looked at me,

and once he said how jolly it was that we were here, and were going home together. So I'm a sort of comfort to him, which I'm frightfully glad of, and is just what I want to be. I'm not sure I shan't try to get him to say something later on. After all, everybody knows. I hate her for treating him like that, though of course I'm glad in a way. It shows what she would have been like. She must have made him think that she loved him, and of course he is bowled over. I heard him walking up and down the balcony last night. When he came into my room this morning he said that he had got up to see the sun rise, but it was quite dark when I heard him. After he had had his *petit déjeuner* he went back to bed and slept till ten nearly, which is a good thing.

"But you mustn't think he is moping. It isn't like that at all. He is very cheerful and amusing generally, and we are having a lovely time. I've only told you what I have seen behind it. I'm sure he just wants to forget all about it, and I'm going to help him the very best way I can. I do love him. I shan't marry at all, but shall live at home and look after him. Of course I don't blame you for marrying, darling, as you had to. But I've thought it over and I don't care about it for myself."

Barbara also wrote to Bunting—a not too indulgent description of the people staying in the hotel, with references to the changed aspect of the country, and to some places that he knew.

"Dad is enjoying his holiday," she wrote, "and

looks better already. He was rather run down, but he is picking up in this jolly air, and getting very active. He makes me laugh all the time, he is so pleased with everything. I was rather a fool to write to you what I did from Paris. I suppose I was bored at not being at home, and got ideas into my head. But when you told me what that little ass Jimmy said, I didn't worry any more. I knew that I was safe in believing the opposite. Dad is very pleased at Ella's engagement to Sir John Ambleside, as of course he is very fond of her, as she has been almost like one of us to him, and was nice to him when all of us were away. She has been in love with Sir John for months, but couldn't quite make up her mind to marry him when she found out he was Jimmy's cousin. However, that seems to be his only drawback, and when Jimmy grows up he *may* improve. There's always hope."

Grafton's letters were short, but fairly frequent. There was no further mention of Ella in them, but there was a good deal about Barbara.

"Barbara is a delightful companion," he wrote, some days after they had gone to Château d'Oex. "I've never had her to myself so much before. We never bore one another, and we talk about all things under the sun. She's a dear child, and has developed extraordinarily. There's a lot in that investigating mind of hers, and it's all beginning to come out. It was a good thing to send her to Paris, though I'm glad enough that the time is over, and I shall have her at home now. She says she is going to stay with me for

years and years. But I doubt if I shall keep the sort of young woman she's growing into for more than two or three at the outside. However, they will be happy ones, and there's no reason why the happiness should end when she does get married, bless her!"

One morning they set out very early to walk to the coombe of the Vanil Noir. Grafton carried a rucksack with their lunch, and they walked slowly, as they had learnt to do with a long day's expedition before them. The air was deliciously fresh and fragrant, and the sun had not yet become hot.

They crossed pasture after pasture deep in flowers, and as they slowly mounted, the great panorama shifted and changed; distant snowpeaks lifted themselves into view, and became new mountain ranges; the windings of their own valley were displayed, and little towns and villages on its green floor looked like scattered children's buildings.

They came to the wide solemn coombe, and went up it to the foot of the mountain. The snow lingered here, sometimes in deep drifts, among the rocks, but almost every foot of ground that had shaken off its winter covering was jewelled with Alpine flowers. It was another world they had come to, above the trees and the coarser growths, with a sense of freedom and space and bigness about it that was lacking in the lower valleys. The silence was broken only by the tinkle of the rivulets and the occasional shrill chatter of a *marmotte*, which they could sometimes descry sitting alert on a distant rock.

They ate their lunch of sandwiches, hard-boiled eggs, chocolate, Gruyère cheese, and oranges, with a bottle of Valais wine, and agreed that they had never enjoyed a lunch more. Then they sat with their backs against a rock, while Grafton smoked, and a deep peace and contentment settled down upon them.

"Isn't it perfect?" said Barbara, after a time. "I feel that this is the best that life has to offer, Dad. I wonder how much of that feeling is due to being rested and fed, after having been rather tired and rather hungry."

"I should think about half," he said.

"That only leaves half for the scenery, and the lovely air and the sunshine, and *not* being in Paris, and being with you, and looking forward to going home as the next thing. It isn't enough."

"And it leaves nothing at all for being young, and having nothing on your mind; nothing at all to worry yourself about. That's the great advantage of being young, which you never realise till you're no longer young. When something good comes along, like this, you can enjoy it to the full."

"You've got nothing to worry you now, have you, Dad?" she asked, after a pause.

"No, darling," he said, after another. "The way is pretty clear ahead now. Lots of jolly things to be done and some quite nice people to take an interest in. You and I will be able to do some of the nice things together, won't we?"

"It will be lovely," she said. "We're doing one of

the nice things now. It was rather a good move, our coming here together, wasn't it, Dad?"

"Yes, a first-class move. Do you ever read Wordsworth, Barbara?"

"Not more than I'm obliged, darling. I've read about the tiresome child who couldn't count, and he nagged at her."

"I don't mean that sort of Wordsworth. Mother loved him. She read me things when we were on our honeymoon, going to beautiful places together."

"Then I should like to read him. What sort of things?"

"He makes you see how beautiful Nature is: I can't explain it exactly, but if you take it right it has a sort of soothing uplifting influence on you."

"Yes, I've felt that sometimes, especially since we went to live at Abington. But—perhaps it's because I'm too young—I don't think you can enjoy it so much alone."

He looked at her in some surprise. "Have you found that out already?" he said. "I found it out after Mother died. I was frightfully unhappy. I went away by myself to some of the places we'd been to together. But it made me unhappier still. In fact, it spoilt the memory of those places for me till I went there again years afterwards, with Cara and B. Then I got back my first impression of them."

She snuggled up to him. "Take me to them, sometime, Daddy," she said.

"Yes, I will, darling. You were too young then.

I think perhaps we might go this autumn. It was in September that she and I were married. How happy we were! She had planned out where we were to go to. Mostly out-of-the-way beautiful places. I suppose I had been too busy amusing myself, with other people, to want to go to places simply because they were beautiful, before. But she taught me to love the beauty of Nature, though for a time after she died it did nothing for me."

"Perhaps it doesn't when you're unhappy and alone. Do you think Caroline loves it in the same way as Mother did, Daddy?"

He thought for a moment. "She gets it from her, I suppose," he said. "Perhaps she has it even more strongly. She's going to make it the chief thing in her life, you know, she and Maurice together. And one doesn't feel that she is wrong in doing it."

"Of course, she has tried the other," she said, after a pause.

He smiled at her. "Are you thinking that it wouldn't be enough for you?" he asked. "I don't think it would, darling; it wouldn't have been enough for Mother and me—a refreshment—perhaps the best sort of refreshment, while we were young, and something to come to more and more if we had grown old together. At any rate, you'll have your taste of pleasure, as Cara and B had it, and you'll be right to enjoy it, as they did. It did neither of them any harm and it won't do you any harm."

"Why should it do anybody harm, Dad?"

"Oh, well—if pleasure were put in the first place, for the whole of a lifetime! That's what you see all round you, among people of our sort. It would have been more of a danger for B than for Caroline. But B is all right now. She'll make a good loving wife and mother. She'll have a good time, but she won't put having a good time first."

"I should like you to expound that for me a little, Daddy; for my good, you know."

"Well, I don't know that I'm the best person to expound it to you, except perhaps that I've done it a bit too much myself. You see when you have enough money to do pretty well what you like, you do rather get into the way of gratifying yourself at every turn—or trying to. Even the good things in life—love is the best of them all—you're apt to think more of yourself than of other people—even of the very people you love."

She thought this might be the beginning of a confidence, and listened eagerly for more.

"I'm not sure that the best thing for a man isn't to have something stiff to do," he went on. "I never have had. I've been too lucky."

"You've made all of us happy, darling."

"Well, that's something, isn't it, if I have? You've all made me happy too. Best not to be always looking out for happiness for yourself—much less pleasure. Some clever fellow said once that happiness only came when you weren't looking for it."

"I think the best thing is to do what you can to

make other people happy. I don't mean in a priggish sort of way—setting yourself out to do it—but because you love them and it comes natural to you to want to.”

“I believe you've hit upon the whole duty of women, darling. It's what they are here for. A selfish woman always seems more off the lines than a selfish man. But selfishness is ugly everywhere. You can't always see it in yourself, but when you do you had better get rid of it as quickly as possible.”

“You're not selfish.”

“Most men are. I don't think I'm much different from other fellows. But I like you to think I am.”

“You know, Daddy, I've been thinking lately that it's rather like what you said just now—you mustn't grab at things, and it may not be altogether good for you to be able to get everything you want. By far the nicest of the girls you sent me to Paris to consort with is Nora O'Brien, whom I told you about. Her people are very hard up, and one of her aunts is educating her. The others are all rich—at least their people are—and the richest are the horriddest, except Katie Brown, whose father is a millionaire; and she laughs at it, and would be just as happy if he were poor. I think *we* are all so nice because we really love each other, and that's the best of all the things we have at home; though it's very jolly having a beautiful house and lots of friends too.”

“Yes, it's love that makes the world go round, wherever you find it. It gives you a reason for en-

joying yourself too. At least it does when you've a young woman of nearly eighteen, soon to be launched on the world. I hope you'll enjoy yourself, darling, when it comes to the time for you to go out and about."

"I shall like best being at home with you, Daddy."

"Well, you'll be at home a lot too, I hope. But you must have your fling, and see what the world is like all round."

"I think I shall like it, you know. Caroline did, though she got tired of it afterwards."

"I don't think it was so much that she got tired of it as that she found something else she liked better to put in its place. Oh, I'm happy about Caroline and B both. And about you too, darling. And about Bunting, who is growing into a very good sort of man. In fact I've nothing to grouse about at all, except that I can't have the last five and twenty years all over again. Now I think it's time to be getting down to our happy valley."

THE END

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